

KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

University of Applied Sciences

Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management

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THE SERVICE SYSTEM PROCESS OF KYUAS IN THE EYES OF AN UNEMPLOYED MBA STUDENT

Master's Thesis 2012

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Master's degrees of Finnish universities of applied sciences were made permanent in 2005. These adult education degrees were justified with the working life orientation: the students must have at least three years' working experience after the bachelor's degree, they study beside the work, and they are expected to have a subject for their development task from their work. At Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme has been conducted since 2007.

The aim of this explorative case study is to make the phenomenon of unemployed master's students recognized and to find out what kind of expectations the unemployed MBA students of KyUAS had when they entered the studies, and how the customer service system process of the institute matched with these expectations and the customer needs. The difficulties in finding a subject for the thesis are discussed as well as the development of the service processes of the MBA studies.

The study was made from the unemployed student's point of view by making a theme interview to the focus group of five unemployed students. Other primary sources of information were the KyUAS employees. Some other UASs were contacted to benchmark their experiences of unemployed MBA students. Secondary sources were the publications about the master's degrees of the UASs, the web-pages and the brochures of KyUAS and other stakeholder organizations.

The results show that the unemployed students were satisfied with having a chance of studying during the unemployment period and there were many positive elements in the MBA studies of KyUAS. However, adults are demanding and critical students. According to the replies some features of the core service, the instruction, should be developed as well as the support services. Suggestions are given to develop the international aspects and the courses and especially the diversity of the lecturers considering the possibilities of virtual education. Finding thesis subjects can be organized within the existing processes of KyUAS. The service processes of the MBA studies can be developed with an evaluation model.

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Appendix 1. Theme interview questions

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The background

Today it is quite normal that there are periods of employment and unemployment in a person's career. Lifelong learning is needed to keep in rhythm with the changing needs of the working life. This phenomenon is also experienced in the province of Kymenlaakso during the latest years, as there is a serious structural change going on. Kymenlaakso area has been very dependent on the traditional forest industry, their products and exports. Due to the radical reduction in the paper producing capacity in Finland, thousands of employees have been laid off from the big paper companies. As the forest industry with its small and medium size partner companies is diminishing, new and innovational business is urgently needed in Kymenlaakso. Also up-to-date education is needed by those people who may have been working 10, 20 or even more than 35 years in paper production and sales (or related companies) and who are now being unemployed or in the risk of becoming unemployed.

When I became unemployed after a 22-year career in the forest industry, I was told by the local Employment and Economic Development Office that I can start studies as a change security student either in some vocational institute or at a university of applied sciences. A change security student is a person who has been dismissed for production-related or economic reasons after several years' working relationship, and who then starts the studies in some institute in accordance of the contract between the institute and the Employment and Economic Development Office.

In Kymenlaakso the only institution of higher education is Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS), situated in Kouvola and Kotka (KyAMK – napakymppi. 2011). On the web-pages of KyUAS I found information about the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme. Although the universities of the applied sciences have existed during 15 years now, the institution and all the grades are not very well known by all the people. When I started the MBA studies at KyUAS as a change security student in September 2009, it was my first experience of this university.

The MBA studies consist of 90 ECTS, of which 60 credits are professional studies and 30 credits are for the thesis/ working life development project. In the development

project the student develops innovative solutions for the international business of an organisation. The studies last about 2.5 years. (International Business Management, MBA. 2011.) In many universities of applied sciences it is expected that the master student has the development problem already when he or she is applying for the studies and that all the studies would advance this problem solving.

The MBA thesis should be produced between three partners: the MBA student, the UAS and the working life partner. Those students who are unemployed or want to change their career or employer, are in trouble: How to find the thesis subject and the working life partner for the thesis? Also many of those, who are starting their thesis for their employer, need to change the subject during the studies due to personal reasons or employer reasons. The problems in finding the thesis subject delay the studies or it might even be a reason for interrupting the MBA studies.

With all my failed attempts of finding a thesis subject from the companies during my studies in years 2009 – 2011, I experienced how difficult it is for an unemployed MBA student to find a working life development project all alone. In June 2011 I attended the course of Methodological Summer School in Mikkeli, and when I one day after the course explained to our lecturers my problem and frustration of not finding a subject for the thesis, I was given an idea by a senior professor of Manchester University. She said to me:

“There is your working life problem: How can an unemployed MBA student of KyUAS find a subject for the thesis?”

There are lots of articles and research about the master’s degrees at the universities of applied sciences since the postgraduate degree experiment period of 2002 - 2005, but it seems that the phenomenon of unemployed master students has not been researched earlier. In some publications of the development network the unemployment was touched referring to the difficulties in thesis making if the employer is changing. Also there was an opinion that it is ethically wrong to demand that the students are employed. Considering today’s situation of the working life it is important for the UASs to recognize this phenomenon and to understand the problems, which the unemployment causes to the master students.

1.2 Research objectives and the research questions

The aim of this thesis is to make the phenomenon of unemployed master's students recognized and to find out the expectations, the needs and the experiences of the unemployed students in the service process of an UAS as well as to create plans to develop these service processes. In this case research the object is Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) with its Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. The focus group consists of five unemployed MBA students who started their studies in autumn 2009.

The research questions are:

1. What are the unemployed student's expectations for the MBA studies and KyUAS? How does KyUAS fulfil these expectations and support the studying process?
2. How can an unemployed MBA student find a subject for the thesis?
3. How to develop the MBA studying process of unemployed KyUAS students?

1.3 Research methodology and conduction of the research

Reasoning with ideas in Yin's (2003), Vilkkä's (2005) and Hirsjärvi's & al. (2004) writings, this thesis is an explorative empirical case study with a qualitative approach. This is a unique real-life context case; the unemployed students in the studying process of MBA at KyUAS are a phenomenon on which the researcher can affect little if at all. The primary source of information in this research is the unemployed MBA students' focus group. A theme interview was conducted with these students. The aim of this work was to investigate the needs and expectations of the students and the quality they perceived from the service process of KyUAS. For this purpose, the theme interview was better than an e-mail survey. Some of the employees of KyUAS and personnel of some other UAS's were interviewed, too. The themes of the student interview were selected by studying the publications and the researches made of the master's studies at the UASs and by using the theories of customer service processes. Also secondary sources as brochures, researches, publications and web-pages of several institutions were used to find answers to the research questions.

Vilkka (2005, 11-13) writes about the differences between the universities and the universities of applied sciences referring to the tasks of the universities of applied sciences given by the Act of UAS. Vilkka mentions that among the tasks of the universities of applied sciences, the regional development and the working life are emphasized. This means that the research made within these institutions should be applicable to practice, working life oriented, actual and combining the theory, the experience and the professional practices.

The theoretical frame and definitions of this research were taken from the earlier writings and researches about the master's degrees of UASs and the theories of customer service processes. The theories of customer service and customer satisfaction suited especially well in this case research of education business, as education is a part of service business where the core product, education, is a service. The demand of developing the service process of the MBA studies at KyUAS made it relevant to investigate the theories how to develop the services. These theories, in turn, leading to investigate the mission, strategies and quality systems of KyUAS and even benchmarking the other UASs' web-pages concerning these matters.

Yin (2003, 5) writes that there are three conditions that influence the choice of the research strategy: the type of research questions, the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events and the degree of time scope (contemporary or historical events). Questions "how" and "why" are likely to lead to the use of case research studies, when the researcher investigates an actual phenomenon within its real-life context, the connections between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident and the investigator has little or no control on the events (Yin 2003, 9-13). Yin (2003, 1-2) states that case study research method is used in many kinds of situations to increase the knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political or other complex social phenomena, and it is often used in psychology, sociology, political science, social work, business and community planning and economics. According to Yin (2003, 8, 89) the strength of case study is that a variety of evidence can be used: documents, artefacts, interviews and observations. Among these, the most important source is the interview.

As a student of master's degree program (a student customer), I had very little control on the service processes of KyUAS. The master's studies at the UASs are still a new

phenomenon, which is researched all the time. Within that context, the phenomenon of unemployed students still needs to be recognized and researched. The objective of this study was to increase the knowledge of the phenomenon of unemployed master's students, in this case the MBA students of KyUAS. Different kind of evidence was used including primary information of interviews and secondary information collected from printed documentation or web-pages.

Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2010, 164) list the typical features of qualitative research: the research is a holistic collection of information in real situations, in which the material is mostly collected from people for example by observing or interviewing by semi structured interviews and choosing the focus group appropriately, not by using a random sample. According to Hirsjärvi & al. (2010, 164) the chosen case or cases should be considered unique, the material should be analysed multilaterally and in detail, trying to find out unexpected things and the researcher should be flexible to change the research plan during the investigation.

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 11, 41) state that an interview is one of the basic ways of getting information. An interview is a discussion with a meaning of collecting opinions, information, believes and values and reasons for the interviewee's opinions and actions. The interviewer receives a picture of the interviewee's world and thoughts. The researcher should intermediate this picture of the interviewee's thoughts, viewpoints, experiences and feelings.

Primary information was received by interviewing the unemployed MBA-students of KyUAS. The focus group consisted of five students, who started the studies in autumn 2009 as change security students. (The status of change security student is given to an unemployed person by an agreement between Employment and Economical Development Office and the formation supplier.) The focus group was rather small due to the limited studying timetable. The total focus group was reached; the study included opinions of all the five students. Other primary sources, i.e. the employees of KyUAS, were interviewed at the end of August and in December 2011, and some other universities of applied sciences were contacted by telephone or by e-mail to benchmark their experiences of the phenomenon of unemployed MBA students in August and September 2011.

Earlier research and publications and brochures of the master's degrees of UAS's were used as secondary sources. Also the web-pages of stakeholders of the phenomenon like the Ministry of Education and Culture, Arene ry (The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences) and FINHEEC (The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council) as well as the web-pages of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences were investigated.

Vilkka (2005, 101) writes that the interviews of qualitative research may be structured, semi-structured or unstructured, so-called open ended in-depth research interviews. The semi-structured interview is the most used method of interviewing. It may be also called a theme interview. In that interview type the researcher selects the most important research topics or themes, which need to be asked in order to find an answer to the research problem. In a theme interview the order of the questions during the interview does not matter; the most important is to have a description to each theme. (Vilkka 2005, 101- 104.)

Hirsjärvi & Hurme base their theme interview method on Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956; 1990, as quoted in Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47 -48, 53). The features of this method are the following: The interviewees have experienced a certain situation. The researcher has got a preconception of the important parts, constructions and processes of the phenomena and made certain assumptions of their influence on the interviewees. The researcher creates an interview frame and makes the interview of the subjective experiences of the persons involved. The theme interview may be used for qualitative or quantitative researches, but it does not influence on the frequency of the interviews or how deep the subjects will be handled. The most important is to discuss the chosen themes in interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and to hear the voice of the interviewees, their interpretations and meanings. In theme interviews the themes are the same in all interviews, but the questions or the form of questions may vary. The language and the terms are essential in these interviews; they may cause problems even if communicated in the mother tongue.

One important task of a qualitative research is to be emancipatory, increasing also the interviewee's understanding on the phenomenon and affect positively their thinking and behaviour concerning that phenomenon, as is pointed out by Vilkka (2005, 103) . The interviewees are not only objects of the research, but they can also reflect and de-

velop. When formulating the questions for a semi structured interview, it is good that the researcher knows the focus group, but there is, on the other hand, a risk that this may reflect the researcher's opinion of the problem in question (Vilkkä 2005, 105). Qualitative research is subjective. Hence the researcher's understanding, ideals, desires, beliefs and values influence on the choices, the analysis and the conclusions of the researcher (Vilkkä 2005, 50 – 51).

A semi-structured theme interview was used to interview the focus group of the unemployed MBA students. A theme interview was chosen to find more in-depth information. The themes were selected from and with the theoretical frames according to the researcher's preconceptions and assumptions. SERVQUAL model's determinants were used to create the questions of the inquiry and to analyse the answers. According to Grönroos (2007, 84) SERVQUAL is an attribute based model, in which the customers' expectations and experiences are compared by using five determinants (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) to find out the perceived quality.

The interviews of the research were all made in Finnish, which was the mother tongue of the focus group and the interviewer. The focus group size consisted of five students including the author. All the focus group members accepted to be interviewed, and the four theme interviews were made during November 26 and December 2, 2011. There were various themes, which were explored with several questions (Appendix 1). Although it is very recommendable to make trial interviews to test and modify the themes, the small size of the focus group did not allow this. The interviews took 1 – 1.5 hours each. Two of them were made on the telephone, as there was no chance to meet. The interviews were rather intensive, at least from the interviewer's point of view, due to the large amount of themes and the time tables of the interviewees. The interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder and transcribed on the same day. Face-to-face interview was more convenient as it was easier to communicate. Recording the telephone discussions was challenging as the mobile phone made electrical disturbance to the voice recorder. Although the recording and the transcription caused a lot of work, it helped to make the analysis when all the replies were in a textual form.

Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 171-180) write about the tactics in analysing a qualitative research. First they mention counting, by which they mean telling if some theme appears many times. It is also possible to form classes of themes according to the intensity of the phenomenon or examine the new or old themes, which appear in many interviews. Hirsjärvi & Hurme state, that the most important part of the analyze is to observe the phenomena found in the interviews and their relationships with each other; there are several ways to do this, for example by creating different groups with certain common features or by making two opposite classes and examining the contrasts or by finding exceptions and investigating them.

The small size of the focus group challenged the analysis. However, there were new themes to be found in the interviews or some kind of differences between the opinions of the interviewees to be noticed, which probably related to the interviewees backgrounds. The importance of the themes was different from the author's expectations. While doing the analysis of the interviews, the author noticed that there were so many themes and questions discussed, that there was not enough time to go as deep in the themes as it was originally planned by choosing a theme interview. There would have been replies for which a further question could have been made. All the interviews brought new ideas, which mean that the saturation point of the inquiry was not reached. In research the saturation point is reached when no more new ideas appear in the interview.

Vilkka (2005, 30) explains that generally speaking the research ethics refers to the use of commonly agreed rules towards the colleagues, the research objective, the funds of the research, the principal or the public. This means that the researcher uses methods of data collection and research strategies which are accepted by the scientific society (Vilkka 2005, 30). One of the ethical aspects in this research was to send to the interviewees the text with their citations to check if the researcher had understood them correctly. In spite of the use of mother tongue in the interviews, there were some corrections and some generalizations to make in the written expressions.

1.4 Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS)

1.4.1 General information about KyUAS

The foundation of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) was on January 1996, and the permanent position as a University of Applied Sciences started on August 1st 1999. The institution consisted of 9 former different institutes. (Kymenlaakson ammattikorkeakoulu. 2012b)

KyUAS today is a multidisciplinary university of applied sciences focusing on logistics, health promotion and international business, which is located in campuses in Kotka and Kouvola. There are about 4500 students of which 500 are adult students, and about 400 employees, of which about 220 are teachers. KyUAS is owned by the towns of Kotka and Kouvola and the municipality of Iitti. (Kymenlaakso UAS. 2012.)

KyUAS has got four units: three faculties (International Business and Culture, Social and Health Care, and Technology and Transport) and the Training Services. Each faculty has its own R & D centre: KymiDesign and Business, KymiCare, and KymiTechnology. The Language Department is responsible for language teaching in all the units. The units are responsible for the education, the R & D and the regional development projects. KyUAS also has eight service units: Human Resources Services, International Affairs, Housing Management, Library and Information Services, Student Guidance and Administration, Financial Management, Data Administration, and Communication Services. (Kymenlaakso UAS. 2012.)

KyUAS has a network of over 100 partner universities in 30 countries all over the world, ERASMUS and First programs, student and staff exchange schemes and educational cooperation projects, international work placements, courses taught in a foreign language and a comprehensive foreign language training. (Kymenlaakso UAS. 2012)

According to the Annual responsibility report 2010 (Kymenlaakson ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, 14), the mission of KyUAS is to focus “*on promoting positive changes in the industrial structure of the Kymenlaakso province and the development of innovative, responsible industries in the region, as well as reinforcement of Kymenlaakso’s logistic position and management of changes in the population struc-*

ture. The only independent higher education institution in the province, Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences focuses on high-quality education on RDI activities. KyUAS's strategic partner in the higher education institution network is Mikkeli University of Applied sciences."

The Annual responsibility report 2010 (Kymenlaakson ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, 10) also states that *"Regional and social influence is a central criterion for KyUAS's performance. It is measured with strategic indicators. These BSC indicators include quality awards, degree output, employment of graduates, healthy economy, efficiency of RDI projects, extent of paid services, international activities, student satisfaction and well-being index."*

1.4.2 The Master of Business Administration studies at KyUAS

The studies of Master of Business Administration (MBA) were started at Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) in 2007. This degree programme in international business management is conducted in English. According to Lindeman (2011) 16 – 40 students begin annually the studies of Master of Business Administration with duration of about 2 – 2.5 years beside the work. By December 2011 24 of 121 students had graduated. Approximately 16 % of the MBA students have interrupted the studies. In 2011 KyUS started to organize this education in cooperation with Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences.

The background of the MBA students varies; most of them have graduated from KyUAS or some other Finnish university of applied sciences. A minority of the students is graduated from research university. The students have at least three years of working experience after completion of the post-secondary level vocational degree. The MBA thesis should be produced between three partners: the MBA student, KyUAS and the working life partner. It is expected that the students bring the working life problem from their job to solve it during the MBA studies of KyUAS.

1.4.3 KyUAS is in the service business

Today business is increasingly turning from selling products to selling services. "Service industries are everywhere" write Kotler & Keller (2009, 386) and list several or-

ganisations from government, private non-profit, business, manufacturing and retail sector. The tight global competition and customers' easy access to information cause more expectations and requirements for the producer or the seller: they must add services to their core product to create more customer value.

Education is one part of the service sector. Today universities and universities of applied sciences are competing for student customers. Following the definition of the customer, the students have the ability to choose between different education and universities worldwide. The Bologna Process or the Lisbon Strategy of EU is a sign of this – Europe wants to improve the competitiveness of the education against the other continents. In addition to the international and global competition, the Finnish educational institutes are competing against each other. The young age groups are getting smaller in the future and there are not enough students for each school or university. On the other hand the demand of the life-long learning increases the need for adult education.

1.5 Limitations of the research

One of the typical features of a qualitative research is that it is always subjective in some aspect. The researcher chooses the themes to be discussed as per her or his own understanding of their importance. It is difficult to be totally neutral when planning and making the questions of the theme interview as well as being neutral while doing the interview. Also in this case, it was challenging to stay neutral with this subject when formulating the questions, interviewing or interpreting the interviews, as the subjective experiences and thoughts about these subjects tended to interfere.

Due to the urgent time table, the focus group had to be small and easily found. The focus group consisted of those MBA students who were unemployed at the very beginning of the studies at KyUAS in autumn 2009. Five students were entering the MBA group as a change security student. The studies were agreed between the Employment and Economic Development Office and KyUAS. This way the institute had the information about the student's unemployment. All the members of the focus group were interviewed.

1.6 The structure of the research

The first chapter of the thesis describes the background of the research, the objectives of the research and the research questions, the methodology and the conducting of the research, the presentation of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences and their MBA studies and the limitations of this research.

The second chapter depicts the education system in Finland, the master's studies in the universities of applied sciences and presents the organisations, which are researching the phenomenon of master's degrees of the UAS. Also there is a literature review.

The third chapter presents theories of customer service process, customer expectations, customer satisfaction and the Gaps Model of Service Quality reflecting them to the UAS context and the MBA studies. There is also an introduction and a comparison of the ideas of Zeithaml & al. (2009) and Grönroos (2007) about how to develop the services as well as a description of a model how to develop the master's degrees of the UASs with evaluation, which was created by the Development network of the master's degrees of UASs.

The fourth chapter introduces and discusses the results of the theme interviews analysing them against the theories explained in the third chapter. The information received from KYUAS employees by interviewing them is also included in this chapter as well as the information received from other UAS's when requesting them about unemployed MBA students. After the summary of the research results there are proposals how to develop the MBA programme and the service process of KyUAS.

The fifth chapter includes the author's evaluation of the thesis process and some reflections of the author's learning process during the project as well as some general conclusions.

2 THE UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES IN FINLAND AND THE MASTER'S DEGREES

2.1 General information about the universities of applied sciences

The Finnish education and science policy are in line with the EU Lisbon strategy (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a). The Lisbon Strategy was set out in March 2000 by EU member states and the purpose of this strategy is to make Europe more dynamic and competitive in comparison with other continents. The Lisbon Strategy covers a wide range of policies, and it was relaunched in 2005 with focus on growth and jobs. (Europe's Information Society. 2012.)

The highest education authority in Finland is the Ministry of Education and Culture, supervising publicly subsidized education and training provision of all levels from primary education to university and adult education. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a)

The legislation safeguards the students' opportunities to progress from one education level to the next level. It is possible to reach university or university of applied sciences studies with general and vocational upper secondary certificates. Completing the studies of one level always provides eligibility for the studies of the next level. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011b) The formal Finnish education structure is shown in Figure 1.

The higher education system is created by two complementary sectors: The science universities conduct the scientific research and the universities of applied sciences train professionals for labor market needs, conduct applied R & D and promote the regional development. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a.)

The Universities of Applied Science institution was started in Finland at the beginning of the 90's on trial basis, and it was made permanent in 1996. These universities are multi-field regional institutions. Today there are 25 Universities of Applied Science under the Ministry of Education and Culture, which are run by the local authorities, by municipal education consortia or by private organizations. In addition there is Police College subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior and Åland University of Applied Sciences under the Province of Åland. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a.)

Universities of Applied Sciences provide education for bachelor degrees, master's degrees, professional specialization and other adult education, Open University courses of applied sciences and vocational teacher training. The fields of the studies are humanities and education; culture; social sciences business and administration; natural resources and the environment; technology, communication and transport; natural sciences; social services, health and sport; tourism, catering and domestic services. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a.)

The bachelors degree studies take 3.5 – 4 years of full-time studying, which means 210 – 240 ECTS (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011a). The abbreviation ECTS comes from European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, which aims to make the teaching and learning in higher education more transparent across Europe and to facilitate the recognition of the studies allowing the transfer of learning experiences between the institutions, greater student mobility and more flexible routes to gain the degrees. Using ECTS is also important in curriculum designs and quality assurance. (European Commission Education & Training. 2012.) One ECTS equals to 27 hours.

In addition to the educational task of the university of applied sciences, the Universities of Applied Sciences Act states, that these institutes should support individual growth and professionalism and make R & D, which supports the education of applied sciences as well as the working life and the economical life of the local area promoting the lifelong learning. (Ammattikorkeakoululaki. 2003 § 4.)

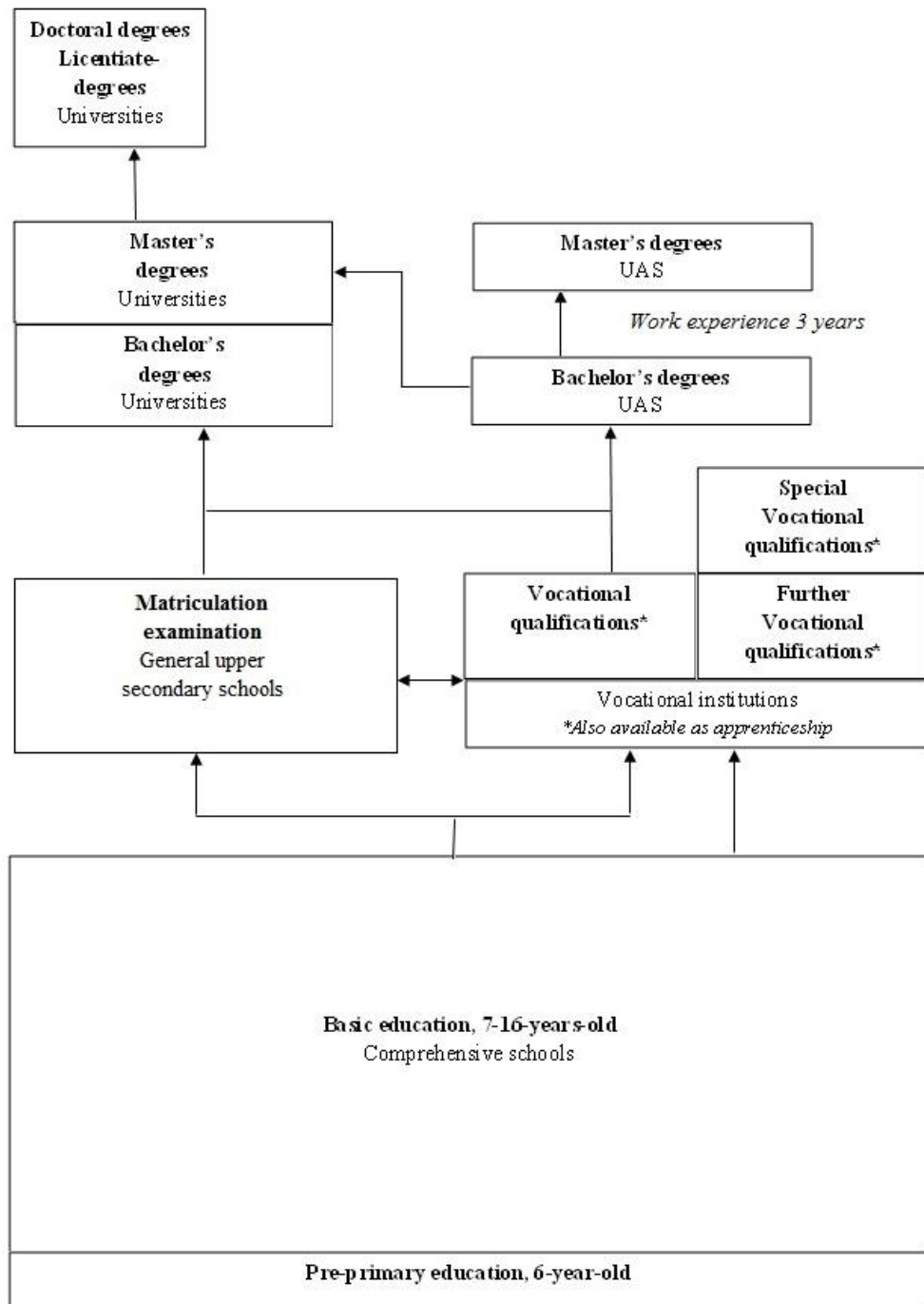


Figure 1. Formal education structure in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture 2011b)

2.2 The master's degrees in the UAS's

After the permanent authorization of the Universities of Applied Sciences in 1996, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (ARENE) started to argue for the need of master's degrees in the UAS's. The arguments for the need of

master's degrees were the change in the working life, the industry's know-how needs for internationalization and strengthening of the dual model of higher education in Finland. (Neuvonen-Rauhala. 2009, 133). This two-cycle model of education was based on The Bologna Process, which aims to harmonize and create a common European Higher Education Area by improving the competitiveness and attraction of European higher education in relation to other continents (The Bologna process 2011).

The master's programs were started with a postgraduate degree experiment during 2002 – 2005, after which the system was made permanent. The experiment was started with business administration, health care and social services, technology and transport. There was a lot of opposition against the masters' degrees of the polytechnics by The Finnish Council of University Rectors, the Confederation of Finnish Industries, The Association of Business School Graduates SEFE, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The master's degree of universities of applied sciences was justified with the working life orientation: the students must have working experience after the bachelor's degree, a possibility of studying while working and the alternation of work and study and it was considered adult education. (Neuvonen-Rauhala. 2009, 133.) According to the Law, the master students must have at least three years of working experience after completion of the post-secondary level vocational degree (Laki ammattikorkeakoululain muuttamisesta 2005 20. §).

The master's studies of business and administration at the university of applied sciences consist of 90 ECTS, of which 60 credits are professional studies and 30 credits are for the thesis/ development project. In the development project, the student develops innovative solutions for the international business of an organisation. It is expected that the student is having the development problem already when he/she is applying for the studies and that all the studies would advance the problem solving.

Due to the different tasks of research university and the university of applied sciences, the research at universities of applied sciences is expected to be practical, working life oriented and actual. The report of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011 c, 7) explains that the master's degrees should support the R & D of the UAS's by developing these universities tasks of the education and the regional development. The master's degrees strengthen the cooperation between

the UAS's and the working life. In future the master students will strengthen the profiles of the UAS's when they became lecturers of their own university.

The goals of the master's studies are specified by an act. The aim is to deepen the professional knowledge of the student and give preparedness to follow the research of the sector and the professional practises as well as general preparedness to lifelong learning, developing the own professionalism, good communication and language skills and international capabilities. Conducting the development task will give preparedness to develop and to show the ability of applying the research information and the chosen methods to solve the working life problems as well as readiness to tasks of demanding professionalism. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011c, 6)

According to the report of Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011b, 14), there were about 6 600 master students in the universities of applied sciences in 2010, of which most were in the fields of social services, health and sport. In 2012 the nationwide goal is to have 3 800 new master's students starting the studies.

2.3 Research and publications of the master's degrees of the UAS's

Master's studies of the UAS's were started in Finland with a trial period in 2002 – 2005. The experiment was specified by the law 645/2001 (Laki ammattikorkeakoulun jatkotutkinnon kokeilusta). There were 20 universities of applied sciences attending the experiment with six different master programs. The Ministry of Education and Culture set in spring 2002 a working group to follow-up and coordinate the experiment. The participants of the working group were representing the UAS's, the teacher and the student unions and the organizations of the working life. Hämeenlinna University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) was taking a coordinating role in the working group. The group was reporting regularly during the experiment by publishing three edited publications (Okkonen, E. 2003a; 2004a; 2005).

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) evaluated the master's degree experiment in two steps considering the opinions of several stakeholders. The first evaluation in 2003 concerned the basis and the start-up of the experiment, and the final evaluation report in the end of 2004 was considering the master's programs in international settings. As a result of the evaluations the FINHEEC recommended mak-

ing the master's degrees of the universities of applied sciences permanent. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011c, 4) The permanency was established by an amendment to the earlier Law of Universities of Applied Sciences 351/2003 (Ammattikorkeakoululaki) by replacing it with law 411/2005 (Laki ammattikorkeakoululain muuttamisesta) from the 1 Aug 2005. The new Act 426/2005 (Valtioneuvoston asetus korkeakoulututkintojen järjestelmästä annetun asetuksen muuttamisesta) stated the master's degrees and defined the status of a master's degree of UAS to be equal status with the master's degree from the research university when applying for a job or office.

The discussion and the research continued after the establishment of the master's degrees of the UAS. The Ministry of Education and Culture continued working of network of the coordination group's for years 2006 – 2009. HAMK took care of the coordination of this work. The aim of this project was to increase the conspicuousness of the new master's degrees, to develop the profile of this education and the applied research supporting these studies, active role in the development of the higher education system on European level and to find out and spread good practices. The tasks were made in six working groups. Every year (2007, 2008, 2009) the project group organized a nationwide forum about the master's degrees of the UAS's. Three edited publications were made: the first on expertise based on working-life relations (Levonen 2007), the second on the future challenges (Maijala & Levonen 2008) and the third on degrees as part of innovation environments (Varjonen & Maijala 2009). (Ylempi AMK kehittämisverkosto. 2011.)

The phenomena of master's degrees of UAS's has also been investigated by Research Unit for the Sociology of Education (RUSE), which is the only institution in Finland specialising in research on the education sociology and education policy and doing international comparative research. In RUSE's publications about the master's degrees of UAS's Ojala & Ahola (2008a; 2009) write about the experiment time with the debate about the new master's degrees, the marketing of these degrees, the expectations and the experiences of the master students, the influence of the master's degrees to the careers of the students and the impressiveness of the master's theses. (RUSE, 2011.)

At the moment the network of the coordination group is continuing as a project for years 2010 – 2012 supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture and coordi-

nated by HAMK. The aim of this project is to clarify the profile of the master's degrees of universities of applied sciences, improve the conspicuousness of these degrees, to develop the research, development and innovation work in the UAS's and the working life and to improve the quality of the education. This work is done in three theme groups. As a result of this project the individuals, the working societies and the universities of applied sciences can prove the utility of the master's degree and the decision makers are acquainted with the master's degree. Once a year this project group organizes a nationwide forum of the actual development themes of the master's degrees and there will be a publication about the development methods of the master's degrees of UAS's and the other results of the project group coming out in autumn 2012. (Ylempi AMK kehittämisverkosto. 2011.)

When accepting the amendment to the law of UAS's in 2005, the Parliament made imperative that the government would report five years later about the status of the master's degrees of the UAS's in the working life and the effects of these programs to the Finnish education system and the working life. The report was made by the Ministry of Education and Culture utilizing the evaluations of master's degrees of the UAS's, the earlier research and follow-up surveys and presented to all stakeholders on February 24, 2011. (Ministry of Education and Culture. 2011c, 3.)

There has been two web-publications of universities of applied sciences: KeVer and Osaaja, which in 2010 were combined to Kever-Osaaja. From the beginning of 2011 these were replaced by AMK-lehti //UAS Journal. This new web-publication tells about the research, development and innovation work of these institutions and the research about the higher education. (AMK-lehti // UAS Journal. 2012.)

KeVer-network brings together the persons from the universities of applied sciences, the science universities and the research institutes, who conduct research and development of the higher education in Finland. The project is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and coordinated by Hämeenlinna University of Applied Sciences. (Kever 2012.) KeVer web-pages provide a lot of information about the education policy, the education sociology and pedagogy as well as links to other web-pages concerning the above mentioned sectors. Also there is collected a register of the publications about the UAS's.

There are also other publications and researches made, among others the dissertation of Neuvonen-Rauhala (2009) about defining and applying working-life orientation in the university of applied sciences experiment and Eriksson's (2010) thesis about the MBA graduates' experiences of the effects of education on career development and compensation.

2.4 Literature review

2.4.1 Experiment period 2002 - 2005

During the experiment period of the master's degrees of UAS's the publications of the coordination network group were a part of the public debate for and against the new degrees. The three years' experiment time gave an official possibility of influencing on the faith of the new education. The master's degrees were made permanent immediately after the experiment period.

The first publication "Ammattikorkeakoulun jatkotutkinto – lähtökohdat ja haasteet. Julkaisu 1" was published in 2003 (Okkonen, E. 2003a). This publication introduces the background of these master's studies and the opinions of different actors of this sector as well as evaluates the meaning of these new degrees in forming the expertise. The actors of the debate and the writings in this publications are multiple, for example The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), the rectors and the principal lecturers of the universities of applied sciences, The Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences – SAMOK, Union of Professional Engineers in Finland, OAJ Trade Union of Education in Finland and the representatives of scientific universities.

Salminen (2003, 6 – 7.) writes that the master's degrees in the universities of applied sciences caused lot of debate. The discussion of the need for a dual system in higher education was started in 1997. ARENE ry, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, was in an active role, after which the Ministry of Education and Culture started to plan the piloting of these studies. The background of the dual model for higher education lies on Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonization of the architecture of the European higher education system in 1998 and the Bologna Declaration in 1999 as well as the need of internationalization of the education. (Salminen 2003, 6-7.)

According to Neuvonen-Rauhala (2009,133) the master's degree experiment was opposed by the Confederation of Finnish Industries, The Finnish Association of Business School Graduates SEFE, the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. Salminen (2003, 7) writes that the debate was high in the Finnish press during 2000 and that the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities wanted the economical effects to the communities to be investigated before the experiment and that the representatives of the scientific universities were against the universities of applied sciences due to the funding and status matters. The arguments of those who were for master's degree of university of applied sciences were the deepening of the professionalism and the working life orientation, the international comparability of the degrees and the dual model of higher education (Salminen 2003, 7).

Neuvonen-Rauhala (2009, 133) states in her dissertation that despite of the opposition the Ministry of Education and Culture continued with the preparation of the master's degree experiment. A periodical Law of experiment (Laki ammattikorkeakoulun jatkotutkiminnon kokeilusta) was established for 1.8.2002 – 31.7.2005 with 300 student places per year writes Salminen (2003,7). Neuvonen-Rauhala (2009, 133) says that the experiment included the sectors of business administration, health care and social services, technology and transport.

The second publication of the master's degree experiment published by the coordination group was "Ammattikorkeakoulun jatkotutkinto – toteutuksia ja kokemuksia. Julkaisu 2" in 2004 (Okkonen 2004a). The book discusses the realizations of the master's studies and the experiences. In the forewords of the publication the Minister of Education, Tuula Haatainen emphasizes establishing the post-graduate degrees and refers to the needs of lifelong learning and the changing age structure of labor as well as the availability and the quality of the education and the counseling.

This second publication (Okkonen 2004a) contains writings about the working life orientation in the master's studies in the universities of applied sciences, evaluations and development ideas of the pedagogical solutions, discussion about the challenges of the thesis of master's degrees, the experiences of the students, the opinions of the working life, statistical information of the experiment and development ideas for the master's studies.

The third publication was “ Ammattikorkeakoulun jatkotutkinto - tulokset ja tulevaisuus. Julkaisu 3” (Okkonen 2005). The book discusses about the results and the future of master’s studies in the universities of applied sciences. It includes discussion of modernization of the higher education, the tasks of the universities of applied sciences, the needs of the working life considering the master’s degrees of UAS’s, the master students’ experiences about developing the working life, the methods of improving professional expertise and the results of the experiment.

In the foreword of the third publication (Okkonen 2005). the Minister of Education, Tuula Haatainen, says that the results of the experiment are speaking for the establishing the master’s studies in the universities of applied sciences. She mentions the existing demand for postgraduate studies after the bachelor degree of universities of applied sciences, which cannot be met by the scientific universities and the equal possibilities of continuing the studies and deepening the professionalism. Also the benefit of master’s degree studies is to be seen in development of the work communities. Haatainen states that the new degree also demands more from the lecturers of the universities of the applied sciences, which has activated the lecturers. She says that important aspects are networking with other institutions, the internationalization as well as the research and development work of the universities of the applied sciences.

2.4.2 Developing the master’s degrees of UAS 2006 - 2009

The first three publications which were edited by Okkonen during 2003 – 2005 expressed the pros and cons for the master’s studies of the universities of applied science. Once these degrees were made permanent, the development network continued keeping on the discussion about the new degrees and created cooperation between the UAS’s to divide the information and best practices, to develop the profile and conspicuousness of the master’s degrees of the UAS’s, to create cooperation between the R & D of the universities of applied sciences and the working life and to improve the quality of the education.

The coordination network group continued its work in a three years’ project 2006 – 2009. Three publications were made and nationwide seminars were held. Although there was no more such a demand of defending the master’s degrees of universities of applied sciences due to the permanent status, there were somehow still writings of defense, at least in the first of three publications edited by Levonen (2007).

In Maijala & Levonen's (2008) publication the articles approach the master's degrees from the futures point of view: how to develop the master's degrees further. The purpose of the book is to keep the discussion about the master's degrees going on also after the establishment. The writings are made by different stakeholders, like the trade union (Federation of Special Service and Clerical Employees ERTO) and employers' union (The Federation of Finnish Technology Industries) and ARENE ry, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. However, most of the writings are made by the principal lectures of the universities of applied sciences, explaining their best practices of these grades or considering the future development of the education. The connections to the working life, anticipation of the future, networking and cooperation, the internationalization, the role of the thesis and many other questions are discussed in this publication.

The third publication Varjonen, & Maijala (2010) discusses, among other things, the national strategies (innovationstrategy, internationalization strategy, entrepreneurship) and their influence on the master's degrees, the practices of the master's degree education and the future challenges of this education as well as how to use evaluation to develop the master's degrees.

2.4.3 Dividing the best practices

There were many kinds of good practices introduced in the publications of the network. Paloste and Paldanius (2004, 47 – 52) suggest that there should be a tutoring and a mentoring system created for the students of master's degree. The tutor would help the student to learn how to learn. The methods of learning and the environments of the studies are changing and causing challenges to the adult students. A lot of studies are web-based, team work or learning together in a diversity of professions. It is demanding to study independently. Tutoring is a holistic way of helping the student through the studying process to reach the goals. Mentoring means guidance, which a senior gives to a novice. In a mentoring process the master students could have this guidance from the working life partner. The challenge is in the training of the tutors and the mentors.

Nurminen, Liikanen & Roihuvuo (2004, 53- 60) describe the experiences of team work in the master studies of North Karelia University of Applied Sciences. The teams were formed of five students, and each of them was leading the team during 3 –

4 months. In the first meeting the team leader tells his or her leadership plan, the goals for his/her own work and the team. The students will receive feedback of their performance as a team leader and a team member and they also have to evaluate their own performance as a team leader and team member as well as evaluate how the team reached the goals and the experiences received. After the feedback the leadership is given to the next member. At this point the retreating team leader estimates the team quality and how it has developed under his/her leadership and how it should be developed in future. In learning organizations the learning happens in teams. With this kind of team work training the university wants to give to the students good leadership skills, dialogical skills and commitment for development work, which can also be utilized when doing the development task.

Kallioinen (2004, 99-100) describes how the master-level students were divided into supervising teams of 4 – 6 students. In these teams they took a look on the research methods from several points of view. The discussion topics concerned, for example, what a master's thesis is and how it differs from the bachelor's thesis or pro gradu of the research university, how to define the scientific study, what is meant by the scientific information in an applied thesis and how to evaluate it, with which methods the working life is developed in the master's theses and what are the professional methods and analysis systems, how the theses are evaluated and what are the criteria and how the theses can be linked to the development of the region.

2.4.4 Working life orientation

The need for the universities of applied sciences was justified with the working life orientation. The working life orientation and adult education nature of these studies were organized by demanding work experience from the students, a possibility of studying while working and the alternation of work and study. (Neuvonen-Rauhala 2009, 133.)

Okkonen (2004a 155 - 174) also includes opinions of the representatives of working life. Knowhow is a success factor of Finland, and master's degrees of UAS are one way of lifelong learning. For working life these degrees bring important new knowledge, skills and applications. In fact the task of the education is two-parted: the education should follow the development of the working life and on the other hand re-

search creates new knowledge and technology, which can be intermediated by the students to their workplaces.

The demand of the working experience of minimum three years after the bachelor's degree is criticized as it might prevent the studies of a person who has worked for a long time before the bachelor degree. The master's degree can be seen as a good way of developing small and medium-size enterprises, as the knowledge of research work is often missing from these companies. The regional aspect of the universities of applied sciences and these studies is important, as now most of the know-how branches have concentrated in the southern part of Finland and big cities. The short physical distance between the universities, the students and the enterprises gives better chances to these studies to be working life oriented and it is easier to combine the development project and tasks with the studies. Considering the immediate economical effects of the studies, it is good that the students may work and study at the same time. Also it is easier for the employers, as there is no need for a long absence of the worker. In addition to the increase in the student's professional skills, the studies will also positively affect the working community.

Salminen (2003, 11-13) writes about the specification of master's degree in university of applied sciences: The focus of these studies is to satisfy the changing needs of the working life and the better know how. An important aspect of the dual model is that there is a possibility to continue the professional studies further. The initial plan was to offer a possibility of taking the master's degree for 10 % of bachelor graduates. The master's studies are for persons, who already have accomplished higher education studies or some applicable studies and have minimum of three years' working experience in the branch after the studies. The studies are working life oriented and conducted with the principles of adult education mainly besides the work. An essential part of the master's studies is the working life development thesis, which basis on the real life context of working life. The student should find a solution to the working life problem during the master's studies. (Salminen 2003, 11-12.)

Neuvonen-Rauhala (2009, 134), in her dissertation, studied the experiment of master's degree studies in the UAS's from the point of view of the working life orientation to find out the characteristics and the links with the working life. The focus of her study was on development of working life orientation during the experiment.

Neuvonen-Rauhala (ibid, 134-139) recognized the actors and their contacts and actions during the experiment process in 2002 - 2005. Her conclusion was that the working life orientation during the experiment somehow developed. The tripartite cooperation (the student, the university and the employer) through the development task was changing the teachers to working life development consultants, the students to working life developers and the working life representatives to commissioners and supervisors of the development tasks or evaluators of learning. However, she found that the studies remained instruction oriented and that the scientific foundation of the development task is emphasized in the instructions for master's thesis. Neuvonen-Rauhala recommends continuing to develop the idea of working life orientation.

Tynjälä, Kekäle & Heikkilä (2004, 14-15) argue that the universities of applied sciences should invest more heavily in activating the working life organizations in the learning process, since now most of the universities relied on the working life contacts of the student and his or her development thesis only. Other things to be developed in the studying process are networking of the lecturers and linking of the R & D projects of the university to the master's studies.

The working life orientation is still today under discussion. There are different opinions of the meaning of working life orientation. In Finland there is an obligatory working period of three years after the bachelor degree, but in other European countries this is not demanded. It is also worth of considering if the UASs should do as the organizations of working life expect or should the UAS's have a more proactive role.

Kangasniemi & Lempinen (2010, 49 - 60) argue that the institutes of higher education in Finland must take a new role in adult education. Due to the ever higher demand of formation and knowledge and the increasing unemployment among the industrial employees the context of the adult education is changing. As the master's studies of the UASs have been integrated to the student's work, there must be choices for the individuals to improve their knowledge. The studies may not be bound to one employer. The degrees are on the first phase for the individual students and not for the companies. Kangasniemi and Lempinen see possible contradictions between the needs of the student and the employer and the use of time. They write that many kinds of postgraduate formations will challenge the master's degrees and for this reason the UASs

should develop for example the recognition of the prior learning, diverse updating education and apprenticeship training.

2.4.5 The working life development task (DPT)

A thesis is without doubt an essential part of the master's studies; a third of the ECTS is reserved for that. In some UAS's it is required from an applicant to have the subject for the thesis already in the entrance exams. The students are supposed to write their thesis through all their studies, choosing the courses that are related to the thesis and doing the assignments in such a way that they support the thesis work.

There are many opinions opposing this system. According to Ojala & Ahola (2008b, 131), the master's degree could be said to consist of the thesis and the lectures integrated to the thesis, and they question if this is right. For example, changing the job will cause difficulties. Another challenge is that making a thesis is a long project. Today's business life is moving quickly and cannot wait the results of the thesis very long. If the thesis is a solution for one organization's problem and if the student is taking all the courses considering this one problem, there is also a possibility that the content of the programme will be too narrow and specialized.

Tynjälä, Kekäle & Heikkilä (2004, 12-13) observe the working life orientation and the practices in the experiment of master's studies in the UASs. They found that most of the universities considered the students and their thesis to be the most important contact to working life. The way of combining the thesis to the studies varied: in some universities the thesis plan was demanded already in the entrance to the studies, while in other universities the thesis was at the end of the studies. Furthermore, there were UASs where all the courses were integrated with the development task. Only a few universities combined the development tasks with their research and development projects.

After analysis of 11 master's theses made during the experiment of master's degree of UAS Asikainen (2004, 90, 97) collected the experiences and best practises of the thesis profiles and definitions, the thesis process, the criteria for the thesis and the qualification demands for the master's degree student. Both names, thesis and development task, were used for this part of studies. The thesis instructions emphasized the working life orientation and applied research. The profiles of the theses of different fields were

convergent and there was a common systematic process of research and development. However, there were not many signs to be seen of large research and development projects or international research in these theses.

Asikainen (2004, 97) argues that the criteria, which were specified for the thesis and the qualifications, were according to the criteria of master's degrees in the Netherlands. According to these instructions the writer of the thesis must show the knowledge of the main trends of the scientific research in his or her branch, ability to independent information collection, handling and analysis, a skill to organize the project and to lead the execution and the implementation of the study to the working life. The student must show his or her talent in his or her own branch by being a theoretical and a practical expert as a working life researcher, innovator and developer. In the summary Asikainen (2004, 97-98) mentions the challenge of creating cross-cultural approach to the master's degree studies and the integration to the research & development of the university and the regional, national and international development.

2.4.6 The R & D of the UAS and the DPT

Combining the thesis with the R & D projects of the university of applied science was considered in several articles. Doing this would help the situation of those people, who intend to change the job or are getting unemployed. Recently the strategies of the Ministry of Education and Culture emphasize the internationalization. This could also be noted in the R & D and theses by having bigger international projects at the UAS's.

Rantanen, Ahonen, Leinonen, Harjulehto, Kaljonen, Sandelin & Ojasalo (2008, 161 - 163) discuss the role of the master's thesis in context of the UAS's task of regional development. From the student's point of view, the task of the thesis is to deepen and to develop his or her skills of research and developing the work. Generally speaking, the purpose of the thesis of the master's degree is often seen to be for developing the student's organization. There are also opinions of the role of the thesis in development of the working life generally, not only company specific. The connection between the thesis and the regional development are found from the Regional strategy for education and research up to 2013 of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Regional strategy for education and research up to 2013. 2004, 12) as follows:

The role of vocational education and training in the regional innovation system and as a regional skills developer will be bolstered through enhanced contacts with the world of work and the development of work-based training forms and learning environments.

Rantanen & al (2008, 163) see that the above statement demands the UAS to develop the cooperation of the students and the working life, the connections between the research & development and the education and to create expert communities. Using the theses of the master-level students in this development is an essential challenge.

Arene ry has raised to the topics the proactivity of the universities of the applied sciences in anticipating the future trends. In the conclusions Rantanen & al (2008, 169) say that there is a demand for a cultural change concerning the studies of universities of applied sciences, especially the supervisors of the master's theses should see themselves as regional influencers and be well networked cross-organizationally and cross-professionally.

Tenhunen and Tervola (2004, 30-31) demand that the research and development projects should be increased in the universities of applied sciences and that the priority should be given to the strengths of the region and the university. Projects which aim at technological or social innovations together with enterprises, research institutes, educational institutions and other stakeholders, are recommended. These projects should be well integrated in the instruction of the university of applied sciences. International exchange programs for students, teachers, researchers and experts should be increased and the lecturers should have more possibilities of attending international research cooperation. With this increased know-how the lecturers can improve the quality of teaching. The master's studies should be integrated to the research and development and other activities of the universities of applied sciences.

2.4.7 The international aspects of the master's programs

Jakubik and Ritalahti (2008,173) write about the international dimension of the curricula of master programs at Finnish universities of applied sciences. Defining the internationality depends on the context they say, and take the point of view of the higher education: what kind of skills and competences are required by the working life. Referring to Kananen (2006, quoted in Jakubik and Ritalahti 2008, 173) they state that

the international business demands team working skills, knowledge of argumentation, customer service and customer mindedness and presentation skills to different target groups and this is what the UAS's should notify in the curricula of the master studies.

Jakubik & Ritalahti (2008, 174 – 175) find five stages and three dimensions in the international education. Referring to Parsons and Söderqvist's (2005, quoted in Jakubik and Ritalahti 2008, 174) framework they list five stages of internationality:

“zero stage where the internationalization activities are marginal; the first stage where the focus is on students' mobility; the second stage focuses on internationalization of curriculum and research activities; the third stage is the institutionalization of international activities; and the fourth stage where higher education institutions focus on commercializing the outcomes of internationalization”.

Jakubik & Ritalahti (ibid, 175) state that the three dimensions of international education are the content, the process and the context. The content refers to curriculum, international cases, international publications, international events, library service, catering service, international marketing materials, international office service, international clubs etc. The internationality of the process may be for example foreign study period, teacher's exchange, job placement abroad, relationship development, curriculum development, quality control and R & D programs. The context includes the foreign partner schools, foreign business partners, foreign students, international staff, international learning environment etc.

Jakubik & Ritalahti (2008, 176) want to challenge the thinking of the ECTS project of 2006 promoted by the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, in which the international competences are stated as generic competences among the others. The international competences in these projects were:

“that the student copes in her or his field of industry with one or two foreign languages in written and oral, understands cultural differences and is able to work in an international work and operation environment, can apply the international knowledge and information of her or his own field and has a holistic picture of her or his field of the industry and its meaning in the global operational environment”.

This is the way that most of the UAS's have used in their masters' curricula. Jakubik & Ritalahti (2008, 177) admit that this looks good at the theoretical level, but they challenge the choice of competences. They also ask if the international operations and services of the UAS's reach the master students or if they rather are mainly planned for bachelor students and their needs.

Majakivi (2010, 27) points out that the Ministry of Education and Culture requires English degrees, which include genuine international cooperation. Especially cooperation with foreign universities and development of high-quality double degrees and joint programs are emphasized. A program conducted in English must include foreign students and foreign personnel. The internationality should be included in the curriculum of the degree programme already in the planning stage of the curriculum, and there should be cooperation with the international partners as well as benchmarking. Distance learning is a chance of taking advantage of international cooperation.

The Ministry of Education and Culture published a Strategy of Internationalization of Higher Education in 2009 for the years 2009 – 2015 (Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009 – 2015. 2009, 9 - 14) in order to increase the strength, the quality and the international attraction of the Finnish higher education. One of the ideas in the background of this strategy is the perception that in spite of Finland's success in so called PISA-research, Finland is behind many other countries in the mobility of the researchers, the lecturers and the students and the students' interest in studies abroad is declined. More highly educated persons are moving out from Finland than are coming in. In the internationalization strategy there are five main objectives: a genuinely international higher education community; increasing the quality and the attractiveness of higher education institutions; promoting the export of the expertise; supporting the multicultural society and advancing the global responsibility.

2.4.8 The awareness of the master's degrees

One of the topics of the articles was the awareness of the master's degrees of the universities of applied sciences. Many working life organizations do not know these degrees. The students were also worried about this fact. Little by little the information about these master's degrees will spread to the organizations when there are more and more graduates. Not having a suitable name for these degrees adds the uncertainty

among the students. In Finnish they may not use the title master, but in English it is acceptable.

Ojala & Ahola (2008b, 122, 126 – 131) report the discussions about the awareness of the new master's degrees among the employers, which was in thoughts of the lecturers and the students. The potential students should know exactly the position of these degrees, as there is a lot of competitive education. Also it would be important to have motivated and good students. The connection to the working life was expected to come through the student's thesis, in which there is tripartite working between the students, the thesis supervisor of the UAS and the mentor of the company. The UASs' needs for more wide working life connection were mentioned, and it was considered important that the lecturers develop their working life network and working life development knowledge. In some universities of applied sciences the students organized visits to their companies or some other organizations during the contact lectures. Combining the master's theses with UASs' R & D was also discussed.

The master degree titles are somehow still unclear to the personnel and to the students of the UASs as well as to the working life partners, as the title doesn't follow the original vocational education of the student. It is typical for master's students that the primary vocational education of the students varies. (Ministry of Culture and Education. 2011b, 7.)

In addition to the awareness of the master's degrees, even awareness of the UASs generally should be increased. According to Vilén (2011, 89) 45,5 % of the companies answered to her survey, that they do not know the services of the UAS (in that case services of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences).

2.4.9 The master students

The second publication "Ammattikorkeakoulun jatkokutinto – toteutuksia ja kokemuksia" (Okkonen 2004a, 128 - 154) includes writings of the master's degree students in different fields. The students were for example reflecting on their motivation for the master's studies. Some people wanted to advance their career and receive a higher status, some people wanted to develop themselves, and they also seemed to enjoy studying in the adult age. Some students worried which competence the master's degree would give to them and if the new degrees were known by the employers. The

studies had given an interest to move to other kinds of jobs. They found their study group was a multicultural, enriching and motivating environment, which gave a good way of networking. The students were very committed to their studies, though the lack of the final degree name made difficulties to their identity and insecurity concerning the working life. The students also reflected their challenges as adult students. In the beginning they could not name their expectations for the studies explicitly. Working and studying at the same time was demanding and the support from the family and especially from the spouse was very important. The students mentioned that the contact lessons are very important, because there the students could share the experience of the entire group and learn together. Lifelong learning is necessary they said.

Okkonen (2004b, 178 - 191) makes a synopsis of the results of the new degrees in the middle of the experiment of 2002 – 2004 concerning for example the election of the students and the amount of the applicants, the background of the students, the studies and differences in the different fields, the lecturers and other questions about the curriculum of the studies: The master student groups are heterogeneous and thus demanding. These students differ in many ways from other higher education students due to their long working experience. Studying and working at the same time makes challenges, but the students are highly motivated. Recognition of the earlier skills and professionalism is difficult when making the personal study plans and probably the student himself or herself is not either able to express their skills. It is possible to check this matter during the studies by updating the personal study plan.

Maijala, Varjonen & Okkonen (2010, 258 – 274) made a follow-up research to the master's students of 2004 – 2008, which tells that about 90 % of the master students had a bachelor degree of an UAS and about 6 % were graduated from science universities. The master's students had been working on the average seven years after the bachelor degree. The average age of the students was 44 years. Nine of ten students were working and studying at the same time. 54 % of the respondents of the survey had made their thesis for the public sector and 32 % for the private sector. In the end of the studies 63 % said to continue in the earlier job, 15 % had continued with the same employer but with a new job and 11 % had changed the job or become entrepreneurs. Three of four students believed that the master's studies would improve their career.

According to the statistics through years 2005 – 2008 the master's studies have taken a little more than 2 years and, the drop-out rate of the studies has been increasing from 4,9 to 7,2 % (Varjonen, B & Maijala, H. (Ed.) 2010, 280).

Eriksson's (2010, 44 – 45) research about the MBAs of the UASs after the degree shows that having the degree has increased the salary by € 400 on the average. 84 % of the repliers of the inquiry felt that the master studies and the degree had had a positive influence on their career. However, Eriksson (2010, 46 – 47) found out in her research that there is a lot of negative experiences among the master's of UAS concerning the title of the degree and the awareness of the master's degree generally.

2.4.10 Summary

Remarkable in all these publications is the cross-referencing to earlier writings or other researchers. There are several stakeholders in the discussion and parties in the phenomenon of master's degrees of UASs: the personnel and the management of the UASs, the science universities, the municipalities, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the trade unions, the students, etc. The education is a highly political matter nationwide.

It seems that many of the subjects discussed will continue being topics of discussion. There are still matters that are unclear like the title of the master's degrees. The study programs are developed all the time and this needs a lot of cooperation when changing the information and also there is a need for a forum of open discussion.

In which way the studies should be working life oriented – modified to the needs of the working life organizations or being proactive to be able to develop the working life organizations – this seems to be a same kind of question as the syndrome “Which was first - the chicken or the egg?”. The R & D and the innovation as well as areal development are under discussion when the tasks and the influence of the UASs' are discussed. The latest topic is the international dimension of the higher education including the plans of exporting the education knowledge.

The unemployment is not discussed in these writings. It might be mentioned in the publications in some way, but it seems that it has not been researched. Today it is very usual that there are periods of employment and periods of unemployment in a person's

life. There is no guarantee that an employment will last till the retirement. Also the individuals may have needs to change the job every now and then. As the master's studies of the UASs are very intertwined with the working life, this kind of challenges in the students' life should be recognized. Considering the demand of lifelong learning it is important to tackle this kind of real life problems so that the unemployment would not prevent or slow down the unemployed person's studies.

3 CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCESS

3.1 Service process

Kotler & Keller (2009, 386) define the service as follows:

A service is any act or performance one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product. Increasingly , however, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers are providing value-added services, or simply excellent customer service, to differentiate themselves.

Grönroos (2007, 53-54) mentions the common characteristics of the services:

Services are processes consisting of activities or a series of activities. Services are at least to some extent produced and consumed simultaneously. The customer participates as a co-producer in the service production process at least to some extent.

Grönroos (2007, 54 – 55) continues with the other characteristics of services: it is impossible to keep the services in stock - rather you keep the customers in stock. The services are intangible. Services do not result in ownership of anything. Due to the heterogeneity of the customers and the personnel it is impossible to maintain consistency in the process. The service is created in a process emphasizes Grönroos (2007, 184). This process is an essential part of the service, and the customer participates the process as a co-producer. The production and the consumption cannot be separated, and the customer perspective must be taken in notice when conceptualizing the service offering.

Grönroos (2007, 362 - 363) divides the service consumption process into three parts: the joining phase, the main consumption phase and the detachment phase. The marketing actions of the service provider attract the client. After the decision of using or buying the service, the consumption phase of the core service starts. During the consumption phase the internal marketing and communication is very important, the needs of the customer have to be satisfied and the customer's value creating process must be supported. On the last phase the client leaves the consumption process.

Using this service consumption process model for the Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) and the MBA students, the external marketing actions attract the students to apply for KyUAS. There are also many other factors, which strongly influence on the attraction of KyUAS, but the institute cannot control them, among others the word-of-mouth. Once the applicants are accepted and signed into the university, they start the consuming process, studying MBA degree. Ending the studies means the detachment phase. During the process KyUAS should get the MBA students' "heart and mind" to make that an enthusiastic marketer of KyUAS, as the most effective way of marketing is the word-of-mouth of a satisfied customer. The good internal communication and marketing are needed to do this effect. KyUAS should serve the MBA students so well, that after the studies they would like to keep in contact with KyUAS and the lecturers, to take an alumni position, to use the KyUAS's open education and to advance the success of KyUAS.

3.2 Service offering

The total service quality perceived by the customer is created by a customer-centric offering, in which all the aspects of the service must be recognized from the customer's point of view. This service offering includes the technical and the functional quality, on which the image and the marketing influence. The technical quality of a service can be divided to the core service, the facilitating services and the supporting services. The functional quality refers to the accessibility of the service, the interaction with the service provider and the customer participation. (Grönroos 2007, 184 – 187.)

According to Grönroos (2007, 185 - 187) "*the core service is the reason for the company being on the market*". During all the phases the customer may use facilitating or supporting services, which enable or enhance the process. These elements, the core service, the facilitating services and the supporting services create the basic service

package, which Grönroos nominates “The Basic Service Package”. The Basic Service package describes the services that are needed to fulfil the customer needs. A well planned Basic Service Package guarantees the technical quality of the outcome (what).

The core service in KyUAS is the formation; in this case the studies of MBA. In addition to the core services, the facilitating services are important, as they make it possible to use the core service. The Student Affairs Office service or the library services are facilitating services as they make it possible to study. Supporting services increase the value of the core service or differentiate the service provider from the other service providers. At KyUAS the supporting services are for example the counselling, the tutoring, the international student office service or the career and recruitment service.

Grönroos (2007, 185-191) writes that in order to serve the customers well also the functional quality (how) must be taken in notice. This refers to the service process. The service process constitutes of three basic elements: the accessibility of the service, the interaction with the service organization and the customer participation. Together these elements with the Basic Service Package form an Augmented Service Offering, which is shown in Figure 2. The accessibility of the service depends for example on the number and the skills of the personnel, the timetables and the office hours and the response times, the location of the facilities and the ease of using the physical resources and systems and the number and the knowledge of other consumers simultaneously involved in the process. Interaction with the service organization may refer to interactive communication between the employees and the customers or various physical and technical resources, interaction with systems or interaction with other customers involved in the process at the same time. Customer participation refers the customer’s own impact on the service as a co-producer of the service and a co-creator of value for himself or herself.

Reflecting Grönroos’s (2007, 187) Augmented Service Offering model in KyUAS’s MBA studies context, the accessibility of the service may concern for example the number of the lecturers and the other employees of the KyUAS, which the MBA student contacts, the skills of these representatives of the institute, how easily the personnel is reached or how quickly they respond to the requests or give feedback of the assignments or the exams. The accessibility can also refer to many kinds of other things, for example the contact lesson time tables, the transportation connections

to KyUAS, the possibilities and easiness of using or reaching the IT-systems of the UAS, like the virtual Moodle learning environment or the physical resources, for example the course books or the computers.

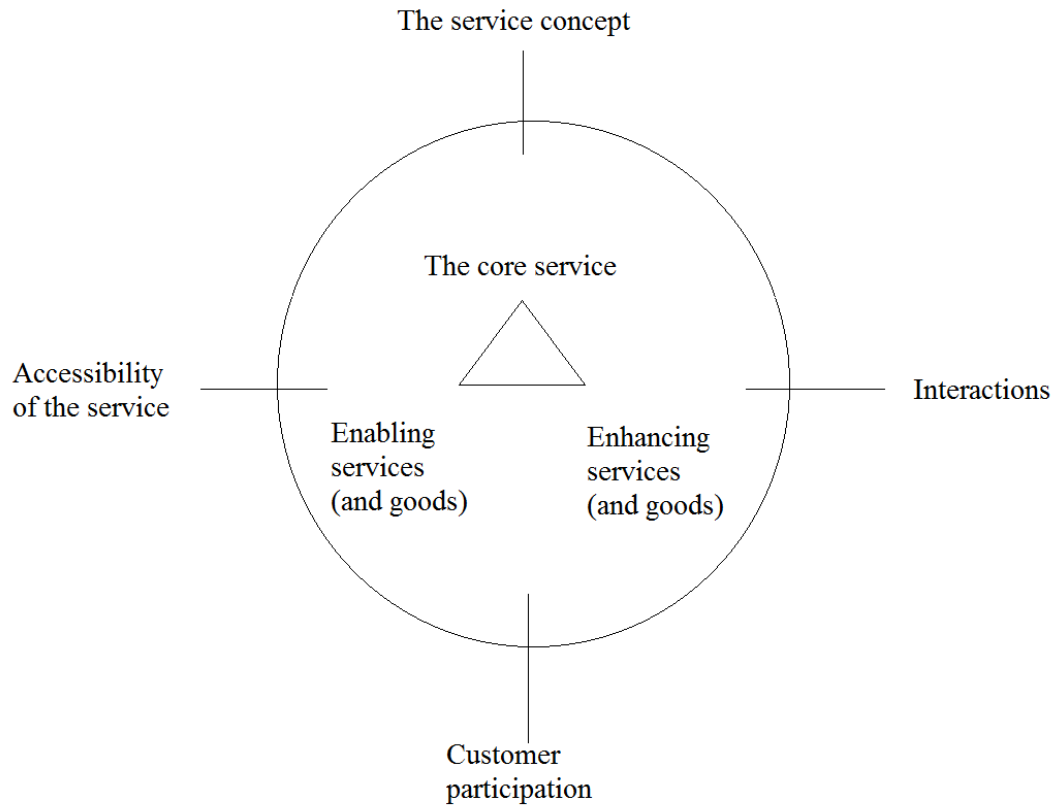


Figure 2. The Augmented Service Offering (Grönroos 2007, 187)

Interaction with the service organization, in this case KyUAS, depends on the lecturers' and other employees' behaviour, their attitudes and their doings as well as the behaviour, the attitudes and the doings of the other MBA students attending the same studies at the same time. Interactions with the physical and technical resources of KyUAS may refer to many kinds of things from the key to the university building to the functioning of the virtual learning environment or the e-mail box of the university. Interactions with the systems in KyUAS context may be for example the Winha enrolling system to the courses, the system of examinations, the system of counselling or the graduating process.

Customer participation in the context of KyUAS and the MBA students refers to the student's influence on the service he or she experiences being a co-producer of the service and also a co-creator of the value for him or herself. A student can improve or deteriorate the service through his or her role. The influence depends on the student's willingness to cooperate in the process and also on his or her activity. If the student is not attending the contact lessons or not doing the assignments, it will probably affect the learning. But it is also possible that the students are not knowledgeable enough to identify their needs or problems or they do not have a reasonable understanding of the situation. For example when making the thesis for a master's degree, it is supposed that the research methods and the thesis process are already known by the student. If the MBA student made the first thesis already twenty years ago, at that time there was not very good supervision on the thesis work, if any, and anyway, it was a long time ago, which means he or she would need extra attention or guidance for the research methods.

3.3 Customer service system model

Grönroos (2007, 364-365) has created a model for customer service system (Figure 3). The interactive part of the model refers to the part, which is visible to the customer. In this part the customer is confronting the processes, the customer contacts employees, the systems and operational routines and the physical resources and equipment of the service provider. Nevertheless, the support part is also important in this process backing the service of the customer contact employees and other resources.

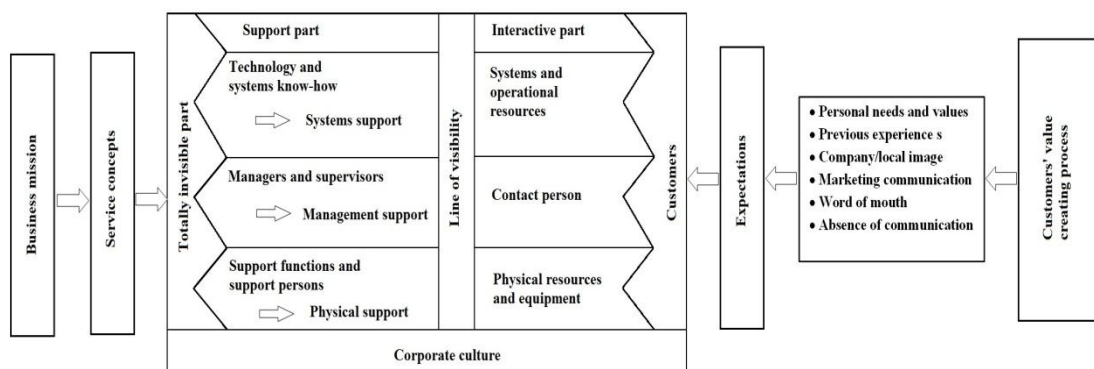


Figure 3. The service system model. (Grönroos. 2007, 364)

Considering an MBA student of KyUAS in this context, the service system model includes a student with his or her expectations and the corporate culture of KyUAS with all the resources, the visible part and the invisible part. The interaction in this process happens between the student and the visible part of the university's resources.

In case of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences the systems and the operational resources could be for example the software systems of the university (Winha, Moodle, SoleOPS, KyAMK Webaccess etc.), the library system of lending out the books in periods of two weeks, the tutoring or counselling system of the school etc. The contact persons could be for example the lecturers and the principal lecturers of the university, the student counsellors, the tutors, the study affairs service officers, the library staff, the career and recruitment service officer, the IT stuff, the international affairs officers, the student health nurse or the psychologist. The physical resources and equipment could mean for example the university buildings and classrooms, the technical equipment like the computers and the printers, the books and the other materials of the library etc.

3.4 Customer expectations

Ojasalo (2001, 200) used the theory of disconfirmation when he studied how to manage the customer expectations to achieve long-term quality and customer satisfaction in a professional services context. In that kind of context the customer expectations are complex. It is necessary to analyze the different types of expectations and their relations and also consider the time aspect in customer service formation.

Grönroos (2007, 100 – 101) refers to Ojasalo's research saying that three kinds of expectations are identified: the fuzzy expectations, the explicit expectations and the implicit expectations. Fuzzy expectations are in question when the customer expects a change, but does not have a precise picture of what this change should be. If these fuzzy expectations are not materializing, the customer finds the service unsatisfactory, but does not understand why. The fuzzy expectations stay fuzzy.

Ojasalo (2001, 204) writes that the service provider should try to focus the customer's expectations by making the fuzzy expectations less fuzzy in a dialogue with the customer. This will help the customer to understand if the service will correspond to his or her needs. In this focusing process the service provider and the customer recognize

together the real problem and its solution in explicit form. Although this dialog is time taking, it will probably increase the customer satisfaction. The fuzzy expectations of an unemployed MBA student at KyUAS could be for example concerning a new career or a new job.

Implicit expectations are characteristics or elements of the service, which are so self evident for the customer that he or she does not even consciously think about them or that they would not be met. Implicit expectations should be revealed by the service provider by going through information, which might seem to be self-evident. Although this will take time from both sides in the short run, the long-term service quality will be higher. Defining the problem and solution well before the service process starts, the disappointment due to the unrealistic expectations can be avoided. (Ojasalo 2001, 203-205.) Considering KyUAS and the MBA student context, implicit expectations could be for example expectations of having a lot of lecturers of different organizations or international lecturers and getting chances to network with several working life organizations through the studies or the internationalization of the studies.

Explicit expectations are customer's conscious assumptions or wishes, to which he or she pays explicit attention considering if the expectations are met. However, the explicit expectations may be unrealistic, and the service provider should help the customer to make them realistic. (Ojasalo 2001, 203-205.) Considering the MBA studies at KyUAS, the explicit expectations concern for example the new skills and the knowledge that the student is expecting to receive during the courses or during all the studies.

The fuzzy expectations, the implicit expectations or the unrealistic expectations in a services context may represent a dangerous pitfall for the customer satisfaction. Managing the customer's expectations is important. The service process and the outcome should match with the customer's expectations to create service quality and customer satisfaction. Managing the expectations will happen by making the fuzzy expectations precise, implicit expectations explicit and unrealistic expectations realistic. (Ojasalo 2001, 200.) In the context of KyUAS and the MBA students, there should be very thorough discussion about the student's expectations already at the application stage, though it might be difficult as the applicant may not him or herself be aware of all his or her expectations. When the expectations are known and made realistic already from

the very beginning of the studies, there will be satisfied students and less disappointment. The motivation of these students would stay higher and the graduation would happen more quickly as the need for supporting services would be known in time.

3.5 Customer satisfaction

Zeithaml et al. (2009, 102 – 110) evaluate and explain what customer satisfaction is. Customer satisfaction refers to the service's ability to meet the customer's needs and expectations. Customer satisfaction is having several components, of which the service quality is one. The other components of the customer satisfaction are the product quality, the price, the personal factors and the situational factors. Customer satisfaction strongly affects the customer loyalty. Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2009, 104) quote Richard Oliver's formal definition of customer satisfaction:

Satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment.

Grönroos (2007, 71-73) writes that services are complex, as they include series of subjectively experienced processes, where the production and the consumption cannot be totally separated and the customer most often participates actively the production processes. Grönroos (2007, 71) states:

An acceptable outcome is an absolute necessity for good perceived quality, but an excellent service process creates a distinct and sustainable competitive edge.

Grönroos continues (2007, 73) that in the service quality literature the quality of a particular service is “*whatever the customer perceives it to be*”. If there is a too narrow scope used in the definition of the quality, it is possible that wrong actions are taken and money and time are wasted. “*What counts is quality as it is perceived by customers*”. In order to improve the service quality it is important to know the expectations of the customers.

Kotler & Keller (2009, 169) use the American Society for Quality Control's (ASQ) definition to tell what quality is exactly:

Quality is the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.

Grönroos (2007, 73 - 75) claims that the quality, as it is perceived by the customers, can be divided in two dimensions, **the technical or outcome dimension** (what) and **the functional or process-related dimension** (how). The technical outcome is what is left when the process is finished. Most often it is easy for the customers to compare the quality of the outcome. Evaluating the quality of the process-related dimensions is much more difficult. The interaction between the customers and the service provider's employees with the critical moments of truth are influencing on the customer's subjective experiences of the functional quality. In addition to the technical and functional dimensions the image of the supplier is influencing on the total perceived quality. If the supplier has a good image, smaller defects may be overseen by the customer. The two quality dimensions could be completed with two additional dimensions: **the physical environment of the service encounter**, **the serviscape quality** (where), which affects on the functional quality and **the economic quality**, which refers to the perceived economic consequences of a certain solution.

Putting these dimensions of quality to KyUAS context would mean that the MBA degree or the new knowledge and skills are the technical dimensions and the studying process is the functional related dimension. Comparing or evaluating the studies' technical quality with other educational institutions or degrees is not very easy. Interaction with the lecturers, the systems and processes of KyUAS happens all the time during the studies and these interactions define the functional quality of the MBA studies. If the service process is failing in the moments of truth, it may cause for example delay in the studies, resignations and negative feelings towards the university and its resources.

How satisfied the MBA student feels with his or her new degree, the new skills and knowledge, what kind of experiences there are of the MBA studying process and what kind of image KyUAS is having will form the total perceived quality, which is subjective for every student. The serviscape, for example the university buildings and equipment, influence on the functional dimension of the quality. The economic quality in this context could mean what kind of career or increase in the salary the student expects after the graduation.

Zeithaml et al. (2009, 111 – 115) write that the customers perceive quality by judging it on multiple factors. They refer to the pioneering research of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, in which five specific dimensions of service quality were identified. They are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Reliability is the most important of these factors. Reliability means the ability to perform the promised service, especially this concerns the core service. Responsiveness refers to the supplier's willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. Assurance means the trust and confidence, which the supplier and the employees can create with the knowledge and courtesy. The customers feel the empathy of the supplier, if it provides them with caring and individualized attention and makes them feel unique and special and that their needs are understood. Tangibles refer to the physical appearance of the facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. According to Zeithaml et al. (2009, 151) SERVQUAL is a multidimensional scale to capture customer perceptions and expectations of the service quality containing 21 service attributes grouped into the five dimensions. SERVQUAL is a kind of relationship survey, as it poses questions about all elements in the customer's relationship.

Considering KyUAS and the MBA program, the reliability refers to the quality of the education; does it correspond to the promises. Responsiveness could mean the personnel's willingness to listen to the students and to help them in their problems, to give prompt response to their questions or feedback to the complaints as well as the personnel's good accessibility. Assurance could refer to a good reputation of KyUAS and its knowledgeable and competent employees. Empathy means that the students are known by name and "history"; the special individual needs are understood and anticipated. Tangibles of KyUAS could be for example the classrooms and equipment, the websites of the university and the Moodle learning platform.

3.6 The Gaps Model of Service Quality

Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler (2009, 31 – 46) introduce a framework called the Gaps Model of Service Quality for understanding how service quality is created in an organization. They nominate five gaps in the services, which affect the service quality. To improve the service quality these gaps should be closed. The gaps model of service quality is shown in Figure 4.

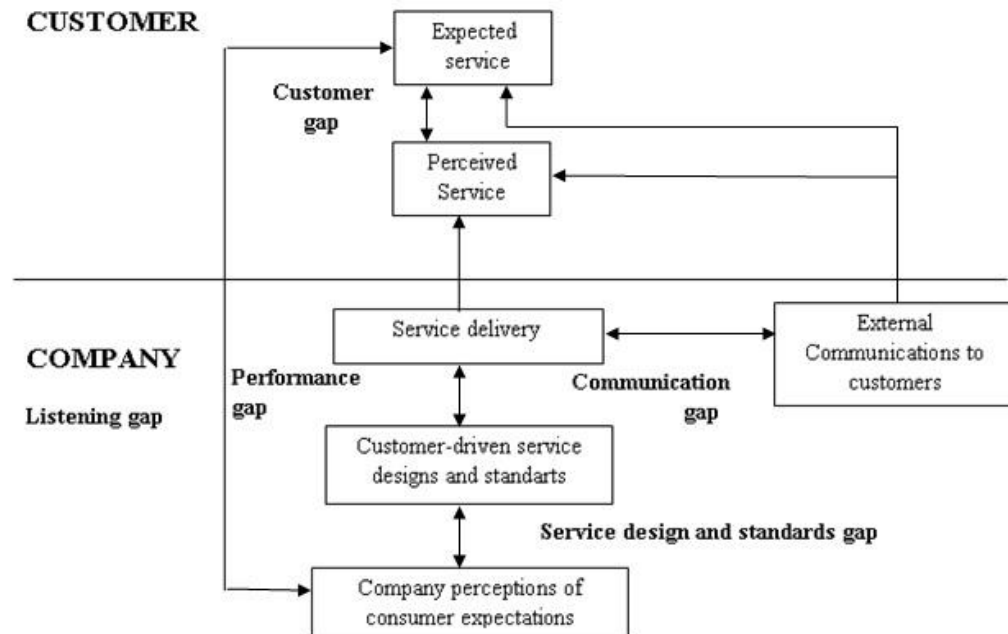


Figure 4. Gaps Model of Service Quality (Zeithaml & al. 2009, 43)

The most critical of these gaps is called *the customer gap*, which means the difference between customer expectations and perceptions. Customer expectations refer to the beliefs of the customer; what should or will happen. Delivering quality service means closing the gap between the expectations and what the customers perceive. The supplier must understand its customers to be able to satisfy them. (Zeithaml et al. 2009, 32 - 33.) Grönroos (2007, 114) explains, that in addition to the providers external communications also the consumer's needs and past experiences influence on his or her service expectations as well as the word-of-mouth communications. In practise this means, that the MBA student has got his or her expectations of the MBA studies at the UAS, and these expectations are created by the student's needs, his or her earlier experiences, the marketing of the UAS. The word-of-mouth may also play a significant role in these expectations.

The four other gaps are called the provider caps, as they occur within the organization providing the service. *Provider gap 1, The Listening Gap*, is caused by the fact that the organization does not understand what the customers expect. Capturing information about customer expectations may be developed through different methods, for example customer interviews, surveys, complaint systems, customer panels or structured

brainstorming. Lack of upward communication is another key factor related to provider gap 1. The management should be in contact with frontline employees to learn about the customers. Everyone who has authority in the organization to do changes or influence, is responsible. In some cases the organization lacks strategies to retain customers and strengthen relationship with them. Service recovery is also important. The organization should understand why people complain, what they expect when they complain and how to handle this kind of situations effectively. (Zeithaml & al. 2009, 34 – 36.)

In the UAS context this provider gap 1, The Listening Cap means, for example, that the students should be interviewed in the beginning of the studies so that the UAS personnel understand the student's individual needs and expectations. A good CRM-system would support this task. There should also be a system of collecting continuous feed-back from the students, good strategies to retain the students and strengthen the relationship with them. The UAS's managers should keep in contact with the front line employees, the contact persons like the student office stuff, student councillors, the health personnel, the library stuff etc., who many times receive the feed-back or comments of the students.

There should be a continuous possibility of checking that all is fine with the customers, in this case with the students. For example there could be a jointly agreed time table of the check points. Keeping the contact and giving a good customer satisfaction could be a gate to a long lasting customer relationship, which in this case can also be called alumni position after the graduation. The graduated MBA's would later on act as lecturers in the UAS or as contact persons in various companies and other organizations or attend the life of the UAS in some other ways after the graduation.

Provider gap 2, The Service Design and Standards Gap, refers to the difficulties of the service organizations to translate customer expectations into service quality specifications that employees can understand and execute. These designs and standards should correspond to customer expectations and priorities rather than the organization's productivity or efficiency. Due to the services intangibility it is difficult to describe and communicate. Especially when new services are developed or existing services are improved, it is critical that all people of the organization from managers and frontline employees and to behind-the-scenes support staff have the same vision and

are working with the same concepts based on the customer needs and expectations. The standards against which the customer contact personnel is evaluated and compensated signal the priorities of the management and what kind of performance counts. (Zeithaml et al. 2009, 36 – 38.)

In the UAS context this means that all the personnel from the management to the behind-the-scenes support staff and the frontline personnel understand that the students are their customers, and the organization should support the students in their process of creating the utmost value of their studies. Even if the UAS degrees normally are free of charge for most students, the students spend a lot of time and energy to struggle through their studies and they want learn as much as possible. Especially this concerns the master level students, who come to the UAS to deepen their knowledge and who want to get a relevant degree to reach more demanding jobs. The master students have earlier experiences of other educational systems and their working experience, which makes them to evaluate the different institutions and their systems rather critically.

Provider gap 3, The Service Performance Gap, means the discrepancy between the developed, customer driven service designs and standards and the actual service performance of the organization's employees. The standards must be backed by appropriate resources of people, systems and technology and the employees must be measured and compensated by using the customer driven designs and standards. The organization should support the service standards by facilitating, encouraging and requiring them from the employees. The factors influencing gap 3 are relating to the organization's human resource, the customers or the intermediaries used when delivering service. One more factor is the difficulty of matching the supply and demand as the service is perishable, it is impossible to keep inventory. (Zeithaml et al. 2009, 38 – 41.)

At the UAS there might be many different kinds of service for the students in addition to the core product, the education. Concerning the education there must be enough qualified lecturers and well functioning IT-systems to support the student's learning process. Today the virtual studies are replacing more and more contact lessons. This does not necessarily mean that fewer lecturers are needed. The education is just changing form. Working with a virtual education system allows the studies to be made in a more individual rhythm and in the student's own time table. Virtual studies also

facilitate the use of experts or materials, which otherwise are not reachable. Some of the other things that influence on the service of the UAS are for example the times of the lectures, the opening hours of the student office or the availability of the student councillors or health personnel.

Provider gap 4, The Communication Gap, refers to the discrepancy between the service provider's external communication and the service delivery. The customer expectations may be raised by promises given through the organization's media advertising, the sales force or other communication. This may also mean a rise in the standards against which the customer assesses the service quality. It is important to coordinate the actual service delivery with external communication. (Zeithaml et al. 2009, 42 – 43.)

Today the UAS's are in a competition situation, they must compete to get new students as the young generations are getting smaller. Today it is also easy to find information of different studying possibilities and compare the institutions. Considering the MBA studies, there is a lot of offer of other UASs', different kinds of programs of the science universities and many other commercial organizations. Many times these programmes are paid by the employers. The UAS's are advertising more or less actively their courses for example with advertisements in the newspapers, through the radio and through their web-pages and brochures.

3.7 Service development

3.7.1 General about service development

According to Zeithaml & al. (2009, 544 - 545) many managers still see that the service and service quality is rather a cost than an investment or contributors to profits due to the fact that service quality's results are cumulative and only one of the variables, which simultaneously influence the profits. However, many recent studies show that organizations which adopt a revenue expansion emphasis perform better and have higher return on quality than those organizations, which emphasize cost reduction or cost reduction and revenue expansion together. Improving customer satisfaction and service quality generate financial return.

Pesonen (2007, 42 – 47) describes different ways of collecting information about the customer satisfaction. Spontaneous customer feedback should be collected by writing a note into the information system immediately after the receipt or later on for example during the meetings. A customer interview can be conducted through a postal or an electronic inquiry or by interviewing face to face. Self-assessment is an economical way of evaluating the customer satisfaction, and it may also be done immediately after the service or once a year. Customer satisfaction can also be followed-up by using indicators and key figures. The research can be made by an outside organization or by the organization's personnel. Pesonen (ibid.) recommends using several means for following up the customer satisfaction. Making conclusions and decisions of the customer satisfaction information and implementing them is the most important.

Grönroos (2007, 112) writes that many times the organisation's approach to the quality programmes makes the improvement processes fail. If the process is only considered as a project, the time frame is too limited and it is considered like a tactical matter rather than a strategic process. The top management should give continuous attention to the quality improvement and the management processes.

Continuous development guarantees the competitiveness of the service (Tuulaniemi 2011, 239). An organization can secure the continuous development and the competitive advantage of its services by evaluation, for which indicators like the customer satisfaction or the awareness of the brand or the reputation are used. Evaluating the services means measuring the interaction between the service provider and the customer. The best practice would be to create the indicators at the same time with the service.

The following chapter 3.7.2 describes of Grönroos's (2007) dynamic model of developing the service offer. Chapter 3.7.3. explains the service innovation and development process created by Zeithaml & al. (2009). Grönroos's (2007) model is for developing existing services while the model of Zeithaml & al. (2009) also includes the innovation of new services. These models include common elements as the consideration of the organization's mission, the focus on the customer and the customer needs or the benefits. Zeithaml & al. emphasize that it is important to involve all stakeholders of the service, also the customers, into the development process and especially the customer service employees should be integrated in all steps of the development process. Zeithaml & al. also mention the service concept's economical feasibility and

the formalization the review process to enhance the service quality from the customer's point of view. Zeithaml & al. use so called service blueprint technique to design the service. Grönroos presents his augmented service offering model (described in chapter 3.2) and how to create the total quality perceived by the customer. He emphasizes the understanding of the service, the importance of the implementation in addition to the good planning and the good preparation of the organization for the implementation. Chapter 3.7.4 introduces an evaluation and criteria model, which is especially created for development of master's programmes of the UASs by the national network of master's degrees of the UASs.

3.7.2 A dynamic development model by Grönroos

Grönroos (2007, 184 – 185) states that the service provider needs an understanding of the service and how to manage it in order to be able to develop or to design a service. The customer's point of view is the base for the model of service offering. In addition to the good planning, a proper implementation is also needed.

According to Grönroos (2007, 184 -185) the service offering management begins from the thorough understanding of the target customer's activities and processes, of which the customer benefit is derived. After this the service concept is developed considering the organizations intentions. The next step is to develop a basic service package, which determines what the customers receive from the organization. These services fulfil the needs of the target customers. The following step is to develop an augmented service offering, in which the service process and the interactions between the organisation and the customers and the co-production aspect are included into the basic service package. This service model represents the total quality perceived by the customers.

The augmented service offering is a static model, which only introduces the elements states Grönroos (2007, 192) and explains that a service process is a dynamic phenomenon. Grönroos describes a dynamic model of developing the service offering, which is divided in eight steps:

1. Analysis of target customer's everyday activities and processes.

2. *Assesment of customer benefits sought to support these activities and processes.*
3. *Defining overall features of an augmented service offering.*
4. *Defining a service concept which guides the development of the service offering.*
5. *Developing the core service, enabling and enhancing services.*
6. *Planning the accessibility, interaction and customer participation elements of the augmented service offering.*
7. *Planning supportive marketing communication.*
8. *Preparing the organization for producing the desired customer benefits in the service processes (internal marketing).*

Working through these steps properly will provide the customers with value-creating support for their processes, argues Grönroos (2007, 193) and emphasizes that it is essential to take care of the implementation of the model in order to avoid problems and pitfalls.

3.7.3 Development process by Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler

This chapter describes the challenges and strategies of innovating and designing services as Zeithaml & al. (2009, 248 – 278) outline them. They present a service innovation and development process with nine steps, starting from the development of a business and new service strategy and ending with postintroduction evaluation of the new service. This process demands involvement of all stakeholders of the service: the customers, the contact employees, the business partners, everybody involved in the service process. Zeithaml & al. state that it is especially important to integrate the service employees in all steps of the service development process. This service development process is shown in Figure 5. The process is divided in two stages: the front-end planning and the implementation. The front-end planning determines, which service

concepts are developed, and the back-end implementation defines the new service concept.

The first step in the service development front-end planning is to review the mission and the vision of the organisation to make a new service strategy and new service ideas to fit with them. The second step of the process is to create a new service strategy and an organizational structure, which facilitates service development through communication and cross-functional sharing of responsibilities.

The third step is to generate new ideas, which may be made by several methods, for example by formal brainstorming, by solicitation of ideas from employees and customers, by making a user research or by learning about competitors' offerings or by collaborating with alliance partners. Observing the customers may help to find out those needs that the customers do not recognize or cannot verbalize. Most often the contact personnel can give ideas for complementary services and ways to improve the current offerings. Organizational practices which encourage to networking and collaboration, may be useful in finding new ideas. Social media and social networks may also give new ideas. There should be an established mechanism in the organization, which would take care of the new service ideas, for example suggestion boxes for employees and customers, service development teams with regular meetings, surveys and focus groups with customers and employees or formal competitive analysis to identify new services.

The fourth step of the service development process is the service concept development and evaluation. It is very important to agree on the definition of the concept and the customer need it fulfils with the stakeholders. After this agreement a description of the concept will be created to represent the specific features and characteristics of the service. Also the customer and the employee responses are determined. This created service design document will then be evaluated by the customers and the employees.

The fifth and the last step in the front-end planning is to estimate the service concept's economical feasibility and potential profit implications. In service business this step mainly concerns the costs of the personnel hiring and training, the delivery system improvements facility changes and other operation costs.

The second stage in service development process is the implementation, which starts with the sixth step of the service development process: developing the service prototype and testing it. Due to the characteristics of the services, all the stakeholders of the service must be involved in the testing: the customer, the contact employees, the functional representatives of marketing, the operations and the human resources. At this step a detailed service blueprint is produced. Several meetings and a lot of testing may be needed to define the details of the service.

The seventh step is the market testing. As the services often are intertwined with the existing services, it is difficult or impossible to test the new services in isolation. However, it is important to do a pilot run to check the operational details. If there are mistakes in the service design, it is more difficult to correct them after the market introduction.

The eighth and ninth steps of developing the services are the commercialization and the postintroduction evaluation. In the commercialization stage the service goes live and it is introduced. Internal marketing will help to build and maintain the acceptance of the service delivery personnel and to inform about the service throughout the organization. During the commercialization stage the service must be monitored through the complete service cycle of the customer experience and the details of the service should be assessed. Also the operating efficiency and the costs should be tracked.

The postintroduction evaluation means reviewing the gathered information of the commercialisation phase and making changes to the delivery process, staffing or marketing mix. It is important to formalize the review process to enhance the service quality from the customer's point of view as the situation is never stable and changes occur.



Figure 5. Service Innovation and Development Process (Zeithaml & al. 2009, 257)

Zeithaml & al. 2009, 278) introduce a technique to use at the design stage of service development, which they call service blueprint. In this technique, the key feature of the service is the focus on the customer. The customers' experiences are documented first and observed all the time meanwhile the other features of the blueprint are developed. Zeithaml & al. (2009, 265) define service blueprint as follows:

A service blueprint is a picture or map that portrays the service system so that the different people involved in providing it can understand and deal with it objectively, regardless of their roles or their individual points of view.

According to Zeithaml & al. (2009, 265-271), service blueprinting is a technique for simultaneously describing the service process, the points of customer contact and the evidence of service from the customer's point of view. Service blueprint can be read in different ways, depending on the purpose, for example to understand the customer's view of the process or customer experience, to understand the contact employees' roles, to understand the integration of the various elements of the service process or to redesign the service.

3.7.4 Developing a master's degree programme of UAS

In order to be internationally competitive institutions of higher education, the UASs need to have an internationally acknowledged quality and continuous quality development, which is stated under the Law of Universities of Applied Sciences. The law demands for the evaluation of the education and other operations, performance of external evaluations of the UAS's operations and quality systems as well as publication of the results of these evaluations. FINHEEC (The Finnish higher Education Evaluation Council) has conducted the audits of the quality systems of UASs since 2005. (FINHEEC 2011)

The national network of master's degrees of the UASs, supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, has created a model to evaluate and to develop the master's degrees at UASs. Paasivuori (2009, 239 – 242) introduces this model and the criteria. She states that important in the quality is the principle of continuous improvement and implementation with an orbicular thinking cycle: plan – do – check - act. Quality involves everybody, which means that every actor of the UAS (management, lecturers, support service and facilitating service officers, external lecturers etc.) should know the frames of the master's degrees.

Paasivuori (2009, 241) emphasizes that evaluation of a master's programme must be connected with the quality assurance system of the UAS. The quality assurance must be systematic and concern the total performance of the UAS including the agreed principles and strategies, common procedures and processes, the assurance of increasing competence of the personnel, the cost efficiency, the functionality of the support services, the management and the leadership as well as the procedures of the follow-up and evaluation and the indicators of the results. There must also be procedures of reporting and handling the feed-back.

According Paasivuori (2009, 241 – 243) the goal of this evaluation model of the master's degrees of UASs is to receive information of the processes, the achieved results and how the results meet the objectives. This information reveals if the results derive from the planned operations, what kind of strengths and weaknesses there and also the good practises. The model is divided in three components: the basis, the evaluation fields and the results. **The bases** are created by the national and European frames like Bologna process, European Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications

Framework, The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the laws and the acts concerning the universities of applied sciences. The second part of the model, **the evaluation fields**, creates a structure for the practical evaluation. Within these fields the operations include for example the fluency of the processes, the knowledge of the personnel, the matching of the economical and the support service resources and the steering of the partnerships according to the strategies. The operations must be planned and goal-directed. Planning, implementing, evaluating and developing a degree programme demands intent leadership and steering with assistance of suitable indicators for follow-up and evaluation. The third part of the model, **the results**, should be examined both with quantitative and qualitative indicators to receive a total picture of the level of the master's programme. The indicators are based on the implementation of the UAS's strategy. It is recommended to concentrate on the strategic indicators of performance and the indicators showing the capabilities of the processes and the student satisfaction and the stakeholder satisfaction. The employees' capabilities and the employee satisfaction as well as the financial indicators are also important.

Paasivuori (2010, 245) writes that the evaluation model and criteria for the master's programmes evaluation fields were processed in three steps by the working group between autumn 2008 and spring 2009. The first step was to define the evaluation fields for master's degrees of UASs, the second step was to define the six evaluation fields of a master's degree programme and the third step was to create the criteria. The criteria were tested in spring 2009 by benchmarking those nine master's degree programmes whose representatives were attending the working group. After the benchmarking of the results the criteria were revised and complemented. Paasivuori (2010, 247 – 254) lists the six fields of evaluation and the criteria of a master's degree programme. Every field includes several questions. The fields are:

- 1. Defining the starting point, the needs, the profile and the goals, the methods of evaluation process and the procedures of the master's degree programme*
- 2. Defining the target segment, the marketing and the application, selection and reclamation procedures of the master's degree programme*
- 3. The planning of a master's degree programme is systematic*

4. The implementation of the master's degree programme is planned

5. The impacts of the master's degree programme are continuously evaluated and developed

6. The comparability, the productivity and the impressiveness of the master's degree programme are measured.

The questions under these evaluation fields cover all the aspects of the master's programme from the UAS's strategy to the detail level. The more profound the answers to these questions are, the better understanding there is of the programme with its strengths and weaknesses, which can be seen in Vahvaselkä's (2010, 238 – 285) description of how this evaluation model is used in the evaluation of the master's degree programme of Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The self-assessment and peer review of Laurea's master's degree programme were made in 2010 within a project of FUAS (Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences), a strategic alliance of HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Lahti University of Applied Sciences and Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS

4.1 General notions about the analysis and the results

The theme interview of the MBA students gave answers to the research questions “What are the unemployed MBA students' expectations for the MBA studies and KyUAS? How does KyUAS fulfil these expectations and support the studying process?” The consuming process of the studies was divided into three parts, the joining phase i.e. the applicant phase, the main consumption process i.e. the studying and the detachment phase i.e. the graduation. After the introduction of the joining phase with the expectations of the applicants, the main consumption process is handled. The core service is analysed with the five dimensions of SERVQUAL: the reliability, the responsiveness, the assurance, the empathy and the tangibles. After that the research results concerning the facilitating services and the support services as well as the relationship with the student peers are presented. At the detachment phase the students' thoughts of the MBA degree and their own participation in the service process are discussed. The Gaps Model of Service Quality is used to summarize the gaps in the

KyUAS's service process of the MBA studies. The elements of the theme interviews are shown in Figure 6. The working life organization is drawn with a dotted figure, as it was missing from the studying process of the unemployed MBA students.

The answer to the second research question "How an unemployed MBA student can find a subject for the thesis?" was searched for in the secondary sources and by interviewing KyUAS's employees and contacting some other UASs.

The third question "How to develop the MBA studying process of unemployed KyUAS students?" was considered through the secondary material of theories and examples of developing the services found in books and in Internet.

The focus group of this research was small, consisting of three female and two male unemployed MBA students. The age range of these students was from 32 years to 50 years in the beginning of the studies. Comparing this information with Eriksson's research "MBA graduates' experiences of the education's effects on career development and compensation" (2010, 34 - 35), the age of the students in this research equals with Eriksson's result: 80 % of the MBA students were in the age group of 33 – 53 years when the studies started. One of the students was under 33 years at that time. Eriksson received 157 replies to her inquiry and among these respondents there were only two masters from research universities, all the others had a bachelor degree of a university of applied sciences. In this research, the situation was different, as only one of the interviewed students had the BBA degree of UAS and all the others had a master's degree from a research university. One of the students who had a master's degree from a research university also had an engineer degree of UAS from the time that the Polytechnics were changed to UAS's.

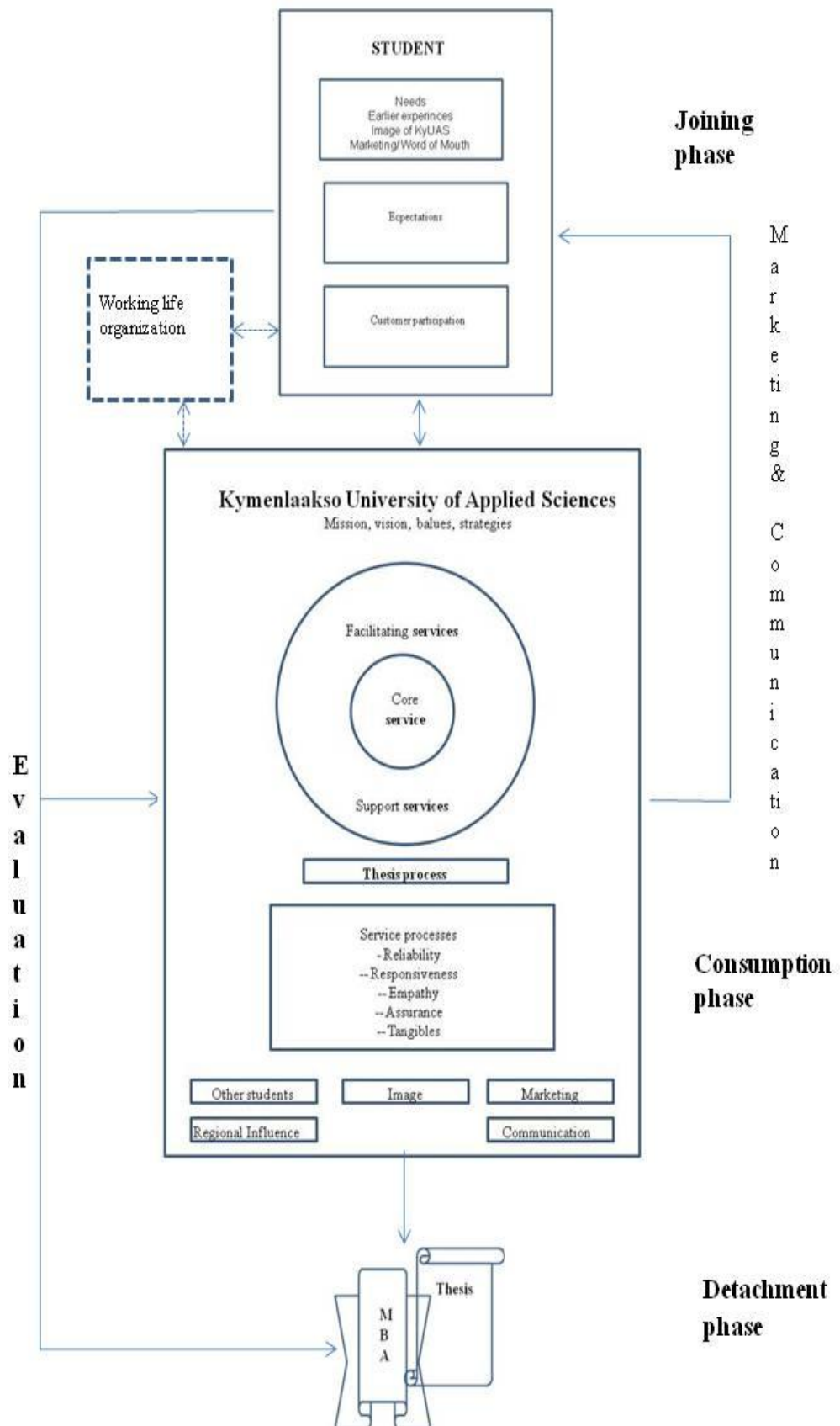


Figure 6. The main elements of the theme interview.

The difference between Eriksson's research and this research concerning the educational background can be explained by the fact that KyUAS is the only institution of higher education in Kymenlaakso and the unemployed persons were not allowed to study as change security students in any science university. The length of the working career in Eriksson's research was on the average 9.8 years, in this research the working career varied from 9 years till 22 years, the average being 15 years, which can be explained by the change security student status.

4.2 The students' expectations in the joining phase of KyUAS

All the five students had unemployment of two or three months before the studies started in autumn 2009. Four of the interviewees heard about the possibility of studying at Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences as a change security student from the officer of the Employment and Economic Development Office. One interviewee had seen an advertisement of KyUAS in the newspaper and contacted the Employment and Economic Development Office after that. The motivation for the studies among those students, who already had a master's degree was the interest of getting financial knowledge in addition to the previous professional skills or to receive new knowledge in general and the participation in the active life during the unemployment. The student who had a BBA degree expected to deepen the knowledge and to create more value with a higher formal degree when applying for jobs.

"I have technical education so I wanted to have also economical education... a little different."

The reason why these people chose KyUAS was the location and the fact that there was not any choice for the change security studies in other institutes of higher education.

"It was the only possibility in the neighbourhood."

"I would have been interested in the degree of Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration, but this was not accepted as change security studies. A student status was not possible for a person with a family".

The marketing of KyUAS had very little influence on the applicants' choice. The students did not have very much information about the master's degrees of the UAS's or the UAS's generally, except those students, who had been studying earlier in UAS or Polytechnics. The different MBA programs of the different institutes were not compared with each other.

“Comparing would have been in vain, as there was no chance. I would have chosen the University of Lappeenranta if possible.”

The Master of Business Administration -degree was appealing as well as the English language of the studies.

“I had seen that MBA's are nominated to these and those jobs, so the title was interesting too.”

“The English attracted me. I wanted to improve my English skills with the business terminology ... it would be nice to work abroad some time. It was one motivation for these studies.”

The expectations concerning the studies (the core service) were not very defined or clear, the students wanted to deepen their knowledge of earlier education or to learn new skills generally. They expected more financial knowledge and the internationality.

“I did not have any special expectations, I started the studies with an open mind, and I was just curious to see what it was about.”

4.3 The perceived quality of KyUAS's service process

4.3.1 Core service

Reliability

When the interviewees were asked about the expectations of the studies when they started, their expectations seemed to be rather unclear or not defined, but when their opinion of the lectures was asked, it became clear that they were disappointed or frustrated in some respects.

“I expected that there would be more basic knowledge, we would have material and learn something, which we could use for doing the thesis. The course of marketing was what I expected: There was material, lectures, an exam and I learned something. The field of studies was wide; there was little of everything, but not enough of anything. I think that the studies should have been more profound or then the chosen students should be only the kind of people, who already knew. So is this a further education for BBA’s of UAS’s only? I think this is a problem to everybody if they thought that after this education they could use the same title as the Masters of Sciences in Economics and Business Administration.”

“The level of the studies....I expected something totally different.... I think this did not... if this should correspond to the degree of Master of Sciences in Economics and Business Administration, it doesn’t.”

Considering these opinions, it seems that the information given about the MBA degree of the UASs is in some way misleading or unclear causing implicit expectations which may not be fulfilled. In the web-page of KyUAS (Kymenlaakso UAS. 2012) it is stated that *“A higher university of applied sciences degree produces the same competency for public offices and tasks as a higher academic degree (e.g. the Finnish KTM degree).* In the interviewee’s case that expectation had been fulfilled by one lecturer, but not by the others.

A similar implicit expectation seems to concern the internationality of the studies. MBA is a degree program of International Business Administration. The program is described on the KyUAS web-page: *“This degree program improves the students’ knowledge, skills, and competence to succeed in demanding development, management, and expert positions with companies and organizations that are already international or on the verge of becoming international.”* (Kymenlaakso UAS. 2012).

“I expected that it would have been more international... in a way it began fine, but in the end the internationality was decreasing ... there should have been more internationality... through the UAS... the kind of seminar, in which there is a foreign lecturer invited, it is not internationality, it is normal life of today! There could have been a visit to a part

nership UAS for two – three days and then we would come back and speak about the culture. If we have an intensive course with a person from another culture to speak to us and we admire her/him and then we go back home.... it has nothing to do with the internationality!”

I expected that it would be genuinely international, that there would be genuine English speaking people, people with different languages so that the spoken language would be English so that everybody would understand, but this kind of artificial English if most of the people are Finnish speaking and there is occasionally one, two, some English speaking student. When choosing the students, it should be so that there really are genuine foreigners, at least half of the group. And then some genuinely English speaking, who do not speak Finnish but some other mother tongue, giving the lectures.

The focus group criticizes the limited choice of the MBA modules. In the optional studies there were only two modules to choose: the legal module or the multicultural module - in fact, there was no choice within KyUAS. If the students wanted to learn something else, they had to find it somewhere else. The other master's courses of KyUAS were conducted in Finnish, and Finnish lectures were not accepted to these studies.

In whole, the courses of the degree were appreciated but on the other hand the students would have expected a deeper level of the knowledge. Also one of the interviewees was considering a possibility of orienting to some subjects. One theme, which was not presented well enough in the studies, was the international business.

“There should be more of international marketing. It was not present there. If this is an IBM programme, it should include more studies of Russian business or Asian business, knowledge of special markets... There could have been some lecturer giving us a lesson of two hours about this kind of specialties, how to behave in these markets, how to get in etc.”

In addition to the above mentioned modules there was a possibility of improving other kind of skills like team working, strategic thinking, networking, leadership, infor-

mation retrieval, learning to learn etc. during the studies. Many of the interviewees stated that those were already earlier skills, but they were happy about the improvement. Someone stated that you will never be ready with this kind of skills. The short course of Enneagrams was appreciated a lot.

Responsiveness and empathy

Finding the thesis subject caused a lot of problems to the unemployed students and it also caused delay in their studies. It was not clear for all the students of the focus group at the very beginning of the studies that the thesis should be started right away or that the thesis subject actually should have existed already when applying for the studies. Although the thesis was said to be an essential part of the studies, it was not clear enough to the interviewees that the system of these studies differs so much from the studies of the research universities.

Also I personally found it shocking, when after some months' studies I was asked to present the DPT plan to MBA student colleagues. I felt very uncomfortable, as I did not have any real case to do. So I just told that I would like to help the small and the medium size enterprises to use the social media in their daily life. I understood that there should be a working life partner contract about this subject, and I contacted one society to find out if they were interested, but I did not have luck.

After this first trial I contacted several SMEs to ask for a subject for the thesis with different subject ideas. There was always some problem to ruin the "good plan". In the small companies the business itself made the people run, and there was no time for strategic work. Many times the entrepreneur did not like to have an outsider coming too close to their business. I was not able to explain very well either what kind of work the thesis would be.

One SME did not want me to investigate their customers and markets although it would have been interesting for them. When I suggested developing their internal communication, they did not find need for that. Instead they would have liked me to create a new design for their invoices and documents. After all the efforts of finding a suitable subject for my thesis and a working life partner I felt very frustrated. I had spent a lot of time and energy for this matter and still I did not have a suitable thesis subject after 1,5 years' search. The MBA studies started to delay.

The problem of the missing the thesis subject caused frustration and delay of the studies to the other unemployed students as well.

“It was getting into a mess when all the time it was spoken to us that when you now already have the thesis going on... and I did not have any thesis to do and not even any subject, with which to work... I expected that first we study and then we make the thesis like in the history.”

“I had already a place to make the thesis, but then it melted away as the person, who hired me, was retiring. In practice he was not at work any more, so there was no more mentor or development task from the company at all, so I could not do anything there.”

“When I did not have it (thesis subject)... I cannot remember any more how many credits there are now are missing because you can only make the assignments and the reports when you have got a title for you're the sis... If I asked somebody for the subject, they just said that do what you want. Then I started to do the thesis and after a couple of pages I began to think... which direction to take as there had not been any glue... I shouldn't have thrown all the idea away... It was frustrating when I started with full energy ... for the third or the fourth time with the same experiment and I knew the disappointment when I went to the enterprise and came out after the fail...”

One of the interviewees had made another kind of decision with this problem.

“The problem was that these studies were meant for employed people ... so I thought, that I will do the same as I did in the science university: first the studies and then the thesis...there was not any other option...”

Finding a subject for the thesis was difficult for many reasons. For example, my network was within one big international company, for which I had been working such a long time. In my small suburb nearly everybody was working for the same company, so I hardly knew any other people from any other companies in my own, local network. It was my implicit expectation to get a better network of the companies during the studies and to find a thesis subject through that network. I also supposed that the

companies of this area would give subjects for the theses to KyUAS – this is how I found my previous thesis subject at the research university.

As I was unemployed, of course I would have liked to find a thesis from some company, which later on possibly could employ me. One of the tasks of the UASs is to develop the regional business life, so I took it granted that there would be a good chance to create a business network during the studies. I expected that there would have been a lot of lecturers from the companies. Finally I felt disappointed when not very many contacts were created with the local companies and not any subject for the thesis was found either.

Marketing one's own thesis to the enterprises is difficult if the student does not know exactly what to market.

“In practice it is really difficult to look for some subject as you do not know exactly what to look for and what to say...”

I was not the only one, who expected that there would have been some thesis subjects available through KyUAS.

“I would have thought that the university had offered more... I cannot remember any real case to be offered... not any concrete subject was offered...”

“Maybe I expected from the university, but I do think that everybody is responsible for his or her studies... the thesis...”

When these students started the studies as unemployed change security students, they could have expected some help in this thesis problem from KyUAS. It seems that finding the subject of the thesis was one of the critical moments in these studies. When the subject was not found, the studies started to delay and there were negative feelings about the studies. One of the students had another experience of her previous studies as a change security student, and this student compared the system of KyUAS with that other organization.

“When I called some (employer) organization with those documents and told them that this is such a product and this person from the school can tell you more about it...It was a complete concept! I knew what to offer when I called an employer... I do understand that we speak about adult education, so you should be more self-guided, but... I would have been more self-guided if I had had the job, then I could have made it for my job... But when you are unemployed, and the situation is somehow... the search of the job... rather stressing even if not actively doing it... in this kind of education without a clear concept, it is not working...”

One problem is the working life organizations' low awareness of these studies. The thesis of an MBA degree is different from the BBA degree and also it differs from the master's (pro gradu) thesis of the science university. Maybe the working life mentors would have needed some kind of instructions or briefing what was expected from them if they had become mentors.

“If the MBA would be a well known concept, it would help in finding small companies and bigger companies, too, which would give a thesis order. Now nobody is having time to assign them or to mentor them as MBA is an unknown concept.”

Concerning the supervision of the thesis process there were not very many opinions, as only one of the interviewed students had graduated, the second had interrupted her studies, the third one had not yet begun the thesis and the fourth student and the author were on the way to write it.

“The process is okay... this is already my second thesis for me, so I do not need so much supervision... it is better to present the thesis when it is ready.”

“The supervisor of the school should have a concise vision. The company's vision and need for the DPT should be taken better in notice. If I make my DPT to the company, they should have advantage of it. Some times I felt that I just make the text for the school. I can understand this is part of the studies but still...”

Referring to the literature review (Chapter 2.4.5), there has been a lot discussion about the DPT and its working life orientation: should it develop the student, the employer, the working life generally, the region or the R & D of the UAS.

The question of critical moments in the service process of KyUAS was commented by the focus group with a positive and a negative answer.

“I was talking with the lecturer about one problem and he was very flexible and understood my situation. The decision was to make a compensatory assignment. It was nice to see that my problem was understood and there is flexibility. That was a good solution.”

“The difficulties with the DPT. I already had a subject for the thesis and the supervisor... We already negotiated the thesis together in the company... but the things were not advancing... the process stopped.”

Concerning the tasks and the time-tables of the lectures the students and the lecturers discussed and agreed together, which was found positive by the students. The opinions concerning the need for the studies of the research methods were multiple. A part of the students thought that there should have been more of it and a part of the students thought that they were able to continue with the earlier knowledge. It seemed to depend on the student's earlier experiences and knowledge how important it would have been to receive more information about the research methods. Of course, the type of the research was defining the method, too. The Methodological Summer School in Mikkeli was a helpful course to understand the total thesis process.

In the beginning of the studies the students could apply for recognition of prior learning for their previously acquired competences. According to the students' experiences this was functioning well. The replies to the question about giving feed-back to the lecturers during the studies were versatile. There was no electrical feed-back system in use. Some lecturers asked for written feed-back and some lecturers were asking oral feed-back. Some students replied that it was easy to give feed-back and some students thought it was not asked or they did not know to whom to give feed-back of which matter.

Assurance

The interviewees' opinions of the courses and the lecturer's were diverse. Probably the background and the earlier experiences of the interviewees influenced on what they expected. Some of the students had anticipated to see more expert lecturers during the courses, persons who are on the top of the Finnish research. – Combining the research and the education so that the lecturers would also be researchers or vice versa has been discussed in public, too. Among the interviewees there was also a desire to have more lecturers from the companies, who would have introduced practices and presented examples of the real life.

All the students liked the marketing course, and the experimental practice of the lecturers.

“I liked the lectures of marketing a lot, I heard new and inspiring stories, which I still think over in my daily life, either at work or something else, I try to remember it... THINK BIG! “

“There were good courses of marketing... the brands and ...you learned to think in the way the customers think. I have made a lot of use for those courses. At work I notice that I can really think in a different way and also notice the way that the technical people do the business...”

The logistics module of the studies divided the opinions: someone said there was too much of logistics; some others said it was new and interesting. The financial module was also appreciated, and there were wishes of having more of it. The assignments of the finance really made the learning concrete. One of the students took an additional course of financial accounting from elsewhere to learn more widely. The leadership training was considered diverse, especially when the change security students could take some of the Finnish master level courses of leadership. One of the lecturers told stories about his job in Asia with real examples, and this was found interesting.

My favorite module was the multicultural module. Although I had been working with foreign people over 20 years, only now I really understood how the differences of the cultures can be found or estimated. There was also interesting team work and material in Moodle, the virtual learning environment. One of the interviewees stated:

“This multicultural knowledge... I do not have any experience... it was very interesting when it all was new for me... the German professor and our professor... multicultural was good! There was deeper knowledge, not only reading the books but really deep... cases like being in business negotiation in Uzbekistan, how to behave there...The lecturer had made a lot of effort for teaching us.”

The way how people learn best and how they want to study depends on each individual. Some students experienced that it was difficult to learn if the course was mainly based on group work and no information of the theories was given by the lecturer.

The students estimated the image of KyUAS to be quite neutral. - The visibility of KyUAS to the public was surprisingly low considering the size of the institute said one of the interviewees.

“There should be more publicity of the good news concerning KyUAS. Now you mostly see negative articles in the newspapers, like the threat of reducing the programs or the number of employees.”

“The enterprises of Kymenlaakso do not understand how well the things are... that there is an institute like KyUAS here ... It is some kind of “chicken - egg -syndrome”. The enterprises should take more advantage of this institute... but maybe they do not know how. They could use the skilled KyUAS students more for marketing studies and for theses of financial controlling or strategy and so on. When the enterprises get good quality master’s and bachelor’s theses from KyUAS, that will bring more prestige and trust for KyUAS rather than separate marketing efforts. Companies are interested in knowing: “What can this KyUAS give to my company in real life?”

Tangibles

The appearance of the physical facilities was appealing to every interviewee. The peaceful surroundings of the old but recently renovated university buildings quite near the city centre was a nice place to study. One of the students opinioned, that these facilities should allure new students. The equipment in the class rooms was modern and

it worked well. All the students received a key to enter the main building, in which the master's degree lectures were held. The students mostly said that the IT programs were working without problems and they were informative - although the author's experience of the KyUAS web-pages and Intranet was that they were complicated. Sometimes it was difficult to find the needed information from the web-pages; even the search-function didn't help always as you needed to know the right key-word to do the search. One of the interviewees referred to the IT systems of some companies and said that the IT systems of KyUAS were good.

4.3.2 Facilitating services

The most important facilitating services of KyUAS's MBA students are the Student Affairs Office and the Kasarminmäki Library. These services of Student Affairs Office were fine and easily reachable. This MBA course had a good luck when one of the officers was studying the same group; in problematical matters she kindly gave us the information via phone, e-mail or Facebook.

“Thank God she was studying with us!”

Kasarminmäki Library was of big help during the studies. It was always easy to find the material from there; also there were electronic books and magazines. If the material was not found in Kasarminmäki, the personnel kindly ordered it from somewhere else. There were lots of tables and computers for the students to use. The opening hours were suitable and it was easy to reach the place as it was situated beside the house the group had the lectures.

“The library was wonderful, I was positively surprised.”

4.3.3 Support services

There were support services for students at KyUAS, but they did not reach very well this MBA group which started the studies in September 2009. The student counselling service would have been important, but unluckily the group was not familiarized with this service when the studies started and then the biggest part of year 2010 the post was vacant. The student counsellor could have worked as the missing link between the student and the studies when there were problems, for example helping to plan the

studies, showing how to use the IT-programs or telling to whom to turn in problems of finding the thesis subject. Two of the interviewed students did not know about the student counsellor service at all, the others knew but had not actively used or could not use as there was none. In some matters the student of the group, who was employed by KyUAS or the lecturers substituted the student counsellor.

“Well, I did not know from whom to ask for help for this kind of situation.”

“I will visit the student counsellor right after this interview!”

There was no special tutoring service for this MBA group. The only tutor was the principal lecturer, with whom the students made an individual study plan. In addition to this the students could ask the other lecturers for help or advice. The International Student Office was known by the focus group, but the services were not used. The student health care services, the psychologist and campus priest of the school were noticed but not used. One of the interviewees replied that she did not know these services were also for the MBA group.

The career and recruitment service was known by these students, but mainly not used. The service offers help in creating the job application or CV and there was a virtual course to help the student, who was looking for a job. The career and recruitment service also offered an access to virtual Jobstep-portal where the students and the employers could find each other. This Jobstep was not known by everybody. Those students, who had seen the web-pages of Jobstep, were of the opinion that it was not interesting or that there was not proper work or thesis offer for this focus group. As the system was nationwide, there were mainly job offers from Helsinki area and it seemed that most of the jobs were for practicum without any salary.

“I have seen the pages, but there was nothing for me. The companies are looking for just graduated young people.”

4.3.4 Student peers

The presence of the other students in the same studying process influences on the perceived service. According to the replies of the interviewees the team spirit was good

and the students made a network, at least with a part of the other students. In the beginning of the studies there were more participants, but especially many foreigners quitted the studies or came to the lectures rather occasionally, which was not good for the group's cohesion.

“It was always nice to come to the lectures. It was to be expected that some students of the group will interrupt the studies in the beginning, but those ones, who stayed...the team spirit was good.”

According to the opinions of the interviewees it was a pity that those, who were not Finnish-speaking, disappeared, because after that it was a little bit ridiculous to speak English between the Finns. Also the multiculturalism disappeared or diminished from the group. Some informal meetings would have been nice, but the problem was that the people lived in so different directions that it was difficult to organize. During the lectures the time table was rather tight and there was not much time for informal discussions, but the social media helped the situation. The Facebook is the medium, in which the MBA group still continues to change the information about the studies. The last lectures for all the group were in May 2011.

“Luckily we had a Facebook-group!”

What the interviewed students learned from their peers was the way to see the things from another person's viewpoint and to understand the own way of thinking. In the MBA group there were persons with different educational and professional background. Doing the Enneagramm test and discussing with the other students about the test results helped them to see their own behaviour and to understand how different people are. – In fact, this diversity should have been taken more in use when doing the tasks during the studies.

“It was an excellent course, in which we made the Enneagramm test... there could be more of this kind of things because we are so different... how to lead different kind of persons or how the people understand your own behaviour...that was very educational.”

4.4 Considerations of the own participation and the MBA degree

The interviewees considered their own participation and activity in the learning process of the MBA studies. Some of them replied that they had studied with all the energy; the others thought that they could have been more active. The student, who was working, replied that sometimes it was difficult to organize the time for the studies and that the lectures of late Thursday evening were hard after the work. Her suggestion was to start the Thursday lectures a couple of hours earlier. The lack of the thesis subject was mentioned to decline the motivation to the studies.

Except for one respondent, the overall impression of these studies was good. Learning new things was inspiring and the MBA degree was seen to be a key to more demanding jobs, though everybody was not starting these studies in order to improve their career but just for the interest of learning. Generally speaking, it was noticed that the employers appreciated the MBA degree and the person's activity of developing herself or himself.

“Of course, when you study, it gives a picture to the employer that you want to develop yourself.”

4.5 Summary of the results

Based on the results of this research at KyUAS, the unemployed students were happy to have a chance for these studies, to increase their competence and to receive new knowledge and skills and they said that this was a positive experience. The MBA degree is appreciated by the employers and this education will improve the unemployed persons' chances for demanding jobs. The students found the personnel nice and flexible and they were satisfied with the servscape and the excellent library service. There were many good elements in the master degree curricula, among others the courses of marketing, Enneagrams, financial course and the multicultural course. The IT systems of KyUAS were well functioning although the Intranet and the Internet pages were somehow confusing as the multiple different systems.

When analyzing the responses of the interviewed students, the impression was that the students mainly considered the **technical dimension (what)** when they evaluated the value of the MBA studies at KyUAS, like the critics about the internationality or the

knowledge which can be created through these studies. The functional or **process-related dimension (how)** was not recognized as well. Although most of the interviewees had had problems to find a thesis subject, they were not necessarily expecting that KyUAS would help them with this problem, even if the thesis was considered an important part of the studies and the delay with the thesis delays all the studies. The third dimension, **the economic quality** was referred concerning the economical results of the studying process. Some of the students mentioned their expectation that the MBA degree would help them to achieve a higher position at work. The physical environment of KyUAS in Kasarminmäki, so called **serviscape quality (where)** was found good.

The Gaps Model of Service Quality shows the gaps, which should be closed in order to improve the service quality. In this research the results show, that the **Customer gap**, what should or what will happen, is caused by the applicants' expectations of the internationality of the studies and the misunderstanding, that the MBA studies can be compared with the professional knowledge of Master of Sciences in Economics and Business Administration. In fact, the web-pages of KyUAS tell that the MBA degree produces the same qualification for public offices and tasks as a higher academic degree (Master of Sciences in Economics and Business Administration), which might be misleading.

The expectations of the applicants are created by the external communication of KyUAS, the applicant's needs and her or his past experiences. Additionally there might be word-of-mouth communication. In this research none of the interviewees told about word-of-mouth communication, probably due to the fact, that this form of education is rather new, at KyUAS only two earlier year courses had started before this group.

The **Listening gap** refers to the fact that KyUAS doesn't understand what the customer expects. Referring to the Customer gap, the expectations of the level of the courses are so explicit, that they are not even checked by anyone. The expectation of the depth of the studies is unrealistic. Other expectations of finding contacts to the working life organizations or finding a thesis subject through KyUAS are implicit, but not necessarily unrealistic. They could be realistic if only the expectations had been known by KyUAS. When these expectations are not understood or found out and discussed in

the joining phase or in the beginning of the studies, the students will be disappointed during the studying process when they realize that their expectations will not be fulfilled.

The Service Design and Standards Gap tells the difficulties of KyUAS to translate the students' expectations into service quality specifications, which the KyUAS employees could understand and execute. In the case that the expectations of the students are not known, it is difficult to fill in this gap. Considering the conclusion that the students mainly appreciated the technical dimensions (what) of this educational service and demanding less the functional dimensions (how) of KyUAS, the institute should still create and improve its service system understanding what really is needed to create value for the students. At KyUAS there are service designs like the tutoring service, the counseling service or systems to find thesis subjects for the BBA-students, but the adult students studying the master's degree have not been taken in notice, at least concerning the MBA group, which started the studies in 2009. The focus group of unemployed master students would have needed the subjects for the theses, but KyUAS was not prepared to offer any subjects. Even if the lecturers knew these problems, they probably did not have designs or standards to deal with the problem.

The Service Performance Gap shows the discrepancy between the developed, customer driven service designs and standards and the actual service performance of KyUAS. This factor is related to the institute's human resources and the intermediaries during the studying process. The internal communication and marketing is very important during the main consumption phase, and it seems that this performance should be improved in order to create more value to the MBA students during their studies. Referring to the discussion with the counseling service officer (Mustapää 2011), the counseling services have now been introduced to the latest year course 2011 MBA students, but during year 2010 there was no student counselor for several months. The counseling officer is an important link between the students and the support services of KyUAS.

The Communication Gap between the KyUAS's external communication and the service delivery can be seen in the expectations of the applicants. These MBA studies were not as international as the students were expecting, and the depth of the studies was not the same as in the Master of Sciences in Economics and Business Administra-

tion degree. Especially the discrepancy in the expectations of the business knowledge concerns those MBA students, who did not have BBA degree or any other business studies. With the limited time span of the MBA studies it was impossible to acquire all the business information, which the BBA's were already having.

4.6 Proposals

Based on the results of this research there seems to be three major themes to be improved in the MBA studying process at KyUAS. Only one of them is particularly concerning the unemployed students; the problem of finding a subject for the thesis. The two other important themes of improvement, the internationality and the courses of the MBA curricula, integrate with the core service of the MBA studies at KyUAS and concern every student of the MBA group. In order to improve the customer satisfaction and the quality of the service processes of KyUAS it would also be important to create a process to find out the expectations of the applicants so that they would not enter the MBA studies with unrealistic expectations. The real needs of the students should also be checked in the beginning of the studies.

The themes for improvement according the results of this research are:

- 1) The internationality in the MBA studies of KyUAS
- 2) The MBA thesis process
- 3) The courses and the lecturers of MBA curricula
- 4) Finding out the expectations of the applicants of MBA studies
- 5) Finding out the needs of the MBA students

As the focus group of this research was limited, it would be advisable to make another research to check the opinions of a larger group of MBA students. It would be very important to receive the replies especially from those MBA students, who have interrupted the studies or who are delayed with the original time table of their studies.

Internationality. The results of this research show that the perceived quality of internationality in KyUAS's MBA studies was not in the level it should be. What the students expect of the internationality could be investigated by another research, doing a

survey to a bigger group of MBA students. Benchmarking the MBA study processes of the other UASs in Finland and internationally would also give new ideas for improvement in internationalization.

According to the respondents, there is no genuine internationality if the courses are in English, but the lecturers and the students are Finns and there are only some foreign students in the group. There should be more international lecturers and the foreign students should be from several countries and cultures to avoid the situation that half of the MBA group is discussing in Finnish and the other half is discussing in their mother tongue. When the students are really multinational, they must communicate in English, the common language.

Travelling abroad is expensive, and if this cannot be done within the studies, the virtual world is nearly as good as the real world. Today also the business world holds virtual meetings instead of travelling – why not to have international virtual lectures or meetings or teamwork. Why not to plan international projects, for which the students could do their thesis. There could be, for example, international projects with international companies or foreign partner UAS's or universities, too. Using the virtual methods could be of big help in this improvement. At KyUAS there are lecturers, who are already using the virtual methods in their teaching to some extent; maybe they could assist in this matter?

Thesis process. The problems with the thesis cause lack of motivation, delay in the studies or even resignations. Mainly the problem is in finding the subject for the thesis. KyUAS should create a list of suitable and thoroughly planned thesis subjects, which are collected from the partner enterprises or within KyUAS and its R & D projects. The students, who are not having a commission of any working life partner, could choose one of these subjects in the beginning of the studies. Today it is rather normal that there are periods of work and periods of unemployment in the curriculum. Studying is a very positive way to update the knowledge or to have new skills. In addition to the unemployed students there also some employed students, who may need a subject for their theses for some reason or another.

Considering the low awareness of these MBA studies and the thesis, there could be some kind of course in the very beginning of the studies explaining what is expected of a MBA thesis. There could also be a brochure, which the students could use when

searching for subjects for their thesis. Probably the potential mentors of the working life would also benefit of a briefing about an MBA thesis, for example having a short seminar altogether with the student group. The mentors would be told what is expected of them and what KyUAS can offer. One question is if KyUAS only offers the official coaching for the student or could there be a supervisor, who also would develop the enterprise with his or her knowledge together with the student? Could there be an introduction list of available master's thesis supervisors at KyUAS with their professional skills? This would help the students when they are looking for the thesis subject.

Courses. The statement in the web-pages and brochures “A higher university of applied sciences degree produces the same competency for public offices and tasks as a higher academic degree (e.g. the Finnish KTM degree)” should be explained better so that the applicants would not misunderstand it. If the applicant is not having previous education in economics or business, these short studies will not give all the knowledge of the Master of Sciences in Economics and Business Administration. In the entrance exams the expectations of the applicants should be checked so that there would not be any unrealistic expectations of the studies when they enter KyUAS.

More working life lecturers should be invited to the courses to tell about “the real life”, the problems they are facing or the solutions they have found or just to tell about their companies. The course time tables are made rather tight, but a part of the theories could be in Moodle learning environment, so that during the contact lessons there could be more visitors and discussions making the theories more real. Creating good and long lasting relationship with the students would make the students to consider alumni position and to participate in the education process of KyUAS later on. Among KyUAS's employees there are many kinds of experts, too. Maybe they could be used as visiting lecturers sometimes?

Support services. Support services are an important part of the studies. It seems that the situation is improving now that there is a student counseling officer for adults, too. The systems and the processes of the support services should be checked concerning the adult students. In order to help the personnel in their daily work and also to improve the customer service and the customer relationship, a CRM-program would be needed urgently. In the CRM-program there could be a part, in which the student

could inform for example that he or she is looking for a thesis subject or work or whatever he or she needs. After the graduation the student could stay as an alumni in that CRM and update her or his contact information and willingness to participate the life of KyUAS in some manner. The CRM could be some kind of “common market” to keep the contact between the students and the personnel of KyUAS during the studies and also after the studies. KyUAS would have a possibility of offering their new services through that channel and also the alumna could inform what would be interesting for them.

Other themes. Having a profound discussion or interview at the application stage would reveal the expectations of the applicants. If the expectations are unrealistic, they should be discussed so that the applicant understands the point. Another profound discussion should be made at the beginning of the studies to find out the real needs of the students. For example, if there is a long time after the previous studies, it is probable, that the students would need some assistance in learning to learn with today’s methods. It is not enough to ask which courses they would like to take or if there are any courses they would like to replace with their previous studies. Especially those students, who do not have earlier experiences of UASs should be told that the thesis is planned to be made from the very beginning of the studies. Although these discussions will take time, that will result in higher customer satisfaction and better performance of KyUAS.

Developing the MBA programme

Chapter 3.7.4. presents an evaluation model, which is created for improvement and development of master’s studies at UASs. This model could also be used to develop the MBA degree studies at KyUAS. As KyUAS’s quality assurance system will be audited in total in 2012, it will give a good basis to evaluate this master’s program. Considering the advice of Grönroos (2007) and Zeithaml & al. (2009) in chapters 3.7.2 and 3.7.3, the students and all the customer service personnel should be integrated into the evaluation process in addition to the lecturers and other personnel of KyUAS (for example Kymi Business & Design). An evaluation, which is based on the KyUAS’s mission and strategies should be implemented and repeated continuously. Finding answers to the criteria of this model will show the good practices and the needs of the improvement. With student feed-back and indicators it is possible to fol-

low-up the development. The systematical evaluation will lead to higher customer satisfaction and better performance of KyUAS. In addition to the self-assessment this evaluation can be made as a peer evaluation with some other institution. Benchmarking the evaluations of other UASs, which already have used this model and published the results in Internet, is one way to receive more information.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Evaluation

The first research questions “What are the unemployed student’s expectations for the MBA studies and KyUAS?” and “How does KyUAS fulfil these expectations and support the studying process?” were replied by this research. Generally speaking, the focus group was satisfied with their studies and KyUAS, but such expectations or needs were found, which were not fulfilled by the technical or the functional quality of the service process. The gaps which were found seemed to be themes which concern all the MBA students, and only one theme, the problem of finding a thesis subject, was especially concerning the unemployed students.

The second research question “How can an unemployed MBA student find a subject for the thesis?” was not so easy to answer. The answer was not found from the interviewed students; some of them were to some extent still fighting with this problem. The secondary sources of this research gave ideas where to find a solution. Also the contacts with the other UAS’s were referring to the R & D of the UAS. The interview of an employee of KyUAS’s R & D organization showed that there are possibilities of finding thesis subjects inside the university. There is a need of improvement in internal communication and marketing inside KyUAS.

The third research question “How to develop the MBA studying process of unemployed KyUAS students?” was partly answered. Considering the word “unemployment” in this context, it is important that KyUAS recognizes that the unemployment causes some problems for the students, especially in finding the subject for the thesis. These problems reduce the motivation of the student, cause delay in the studies or even resignation. KyUAS should organize more support services to help the unem-

employed students with this matter as KyUAS has got means to do it. Also some of the employed students would need to find a subject for their thesis. These problems affect efficiency of KyUAS and in the long run the problems will also affect the reputation of the institution and the well-being of the lecturers. The interruption percentage of 16,5 % within the MBA students of KyUAS is high compared with the statistics of all master's students of UASs in Finland, in which the interruption rate varied between 4.9 – 7.2 % in years 2005 – 2008 (Tilastotietoa ylemmistä ammattikorkeakoulututkinnoista 2009, 280).

Considering the other part of the question “How to develop the MBA studying process of KyUAS students?” demands a bigger development process. The results of this research show some areas of the core service, which should be developed (the internationality and the lectures). A systematic evaluation of the MBA degree studying process of KyUAS would probably bring some more themes to be developed, but maybe it could also give some ideas how to solve these problems.

I was surprised to notice that starting with the “small” problem of not finding a thesis subject I finally ended up to benchmark the mission, strategies and quality assurance systems of different UASs in Finland. During my long working career in a big forest company I was sometimes touched by the quality assurance systems and the audits, but now I realize why this kind of systems are important. Through a systematic quality work it is possible to find out the bottle necks or problems of the processes, products or services and to improve or develop the performance.

Benchmarking the web-pages of different UASs, it was noticeable that there were a lot of discrepancies considering the mission and the strategies of the UASs. Ala-Vähälä (2011, 19 - 20) has been researching the impacts of the audits and he writes that one special feature of the higher education is that it is not unambiguous who the customer is. On one hand it is the student, who can use the new skills on the labour market but on the other hand it is the employer or the society, which is employing this student. In the eyes of the student, the students are the customers of the UASs and the main task of these institutions is to educate. Referring to Vilén's (2011, 70) thesis, this is the way that the working life organizations also see. They say that the most important task of KyUAS is to create high quality professional education and competent labour and that the other tasks of the UASs should be serving the education.

The web-pages also show that there is discrepancy on the level of the quality control systems in the UASs. Ala-Vähälä (2011, 69 – 70) writes that the impact of the audits of the UASs made the institutions to invest in the quality assurance systems and made the quality work systematic. In some UASs the quality assurance system seems to be a daily working tool. There were many interviewees of Ala-Vähälä who were committed to the quality assurance system and who considered that the construction of the system and the preparations for the audit had been excellent learning experiences, giving an overall view of the operations of the UASs' and a possibility to identify the problems or to launch development projects. KyUAS was audited in 2005 and the next audit will be in 2012. Considering the development of the MBA studies, the model of developing and evaluating the master's programmes introduced by Paasivuori would be helpful to check the MBA programme.

In spite of the fact, that this was my second thesis, this DPT process was really educative. Learning at adult age seems to be more profound than at the age of 20 – 25 years. During this thesis process I found out how the understanding grows all the time: those secondary sources, which I studied in the beginning of the research process opened in a totally different way in the end of the process. Learning new knowledge and skills demands time for maturation, in the case of this thesis some extra time would have been helpful. On the other hand this kind of development task seems to be much more demanding than a pro gradu work of the science university, which can be based on secondary sources only.

It was interesting to notice how different motivations, expectations, needs and ideas the four interviewees had. Also this study showed how demanding and critical the adult students are. They compare these studies to their previous experiences of studies and working life and judge on these bases. Although I tried to avoid subjectivity in the research, total neutrality is impossible. Which things to pick up for the theme interviews, and how to put the questions, which questions to ask and how to write the results here in the thesis - this all was decided by me. Hopefully this publication is not doing injustice to anyone's thoughts.

Doing this large research is a huge and time taking challenge. The subject must be fascinating enough to motivate the researcher during all the phases of the research. In the entrance interview of KyUAS the applicants were asked, which subject would be

interesting to research. For my part the answer was the customer service. The same feeling still continues after this research, maybe even more deeply. However, I never planned to develop the customer service of KyUAS, it just happened due to the difficulties of finding the subject for the thesis as described in the background section. I do hope that this research will help KyUAS to develop the studying process as well as the future unemployed MBA students' lives.

5.2 Conclusions and further research

Education and the students are the reason why Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences is on the market. In addition to the instruction KyUAS has got other tasks, which are also stated by the Law on UAS. The R & D of KyUAS should improve the instruction, the working life in general and the economical life of the local area. These other tasks of KyUAS should be integrated more tightly with the instruction.

Education is a part of the service business and like in all business it is important to focus on the customer. Students are the primary customers of KyUAS. It is essential to find out the expectations and the needs of the customers to create the maximum customer satisfaction. Evaluation and quality assurance system will help to improve and to develop the customer service processes of the MBA degree at KyUAS.

One of the aims of this thesis is to make the phenomenon of unemployed master's students recognized. In this study the focus is on the MBA degree of KyUAS, but this phenomenon exists in other UASs of Finland, too. The master's studies of the UASs were originally planned for employed persons, but today the life is unstable. This must be taken in notice within the context of master's studies of the UASs. Promoting life-long learning is one of the statutory tasks of UASs and the MBA degree is one form of adult education.

The MBA degree is good for those students, who already have earlier knowledge in business administration, like the BBAs, or to those students, who already have a career, in which they want to be more competent. For those students, who want to change their career totally, this education is not long enough to give a profound understanding of business administration. Having students with different kind of professional background or different nationality makes the courses more alive, and it also teaches to understand different kind of viewpoints and multicultural matters.

The results of the study show that there were many good features in the customer service process of the MBA studies at Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences like competent and flexible lecturers, unique servscape and excellent library services and good service in the Students Affair Office, among other things. The unemployed students were satisfied to have a chance to study and to receive new competences during their unemployment.

However, there were some problems in the MBA studying process of KyUAS, which should be solved. The problem concerning the unemployed MBA students of KyUAS is the difficulty of finding a thesis subject, which reduces the motivation for the studies or causes delay or even resignation from the studies. This problem can be solved within the other processes of KyUAS. The other themes of developing the MBA studies relate to the core product, and thus affect all the MBA students of KyUAS. Further research is suggested to develop the international nature of this English master's degree program. Another study could include the development of the courses and the diversity of the lecturers. Using virtual methods in the instruction should be considered in both cases.

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Appendix 1

TEEMAHAASTATTELU (THEME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS) - THE SERVICE SYSTEM PROCESS OF KYUAS IN THE EYES OF AN UNEMPLOYED MBA STUDENT

Vastaajan tausta (Background information)

- Sukupuoli (Gender)
- Ikä (Age)
- Aiempi koulutus (Earlier degrees)
- Aiempi työkokemus (Earlier working experience)
- Elämäntilanne opintojen alkaessa (Life situation at the beginning of the studies)
- Mikä motivoi sinua lähtemään opiskelemaan MBA tutkintoa (The motivation for starting the MBA studies)

Miten päädyit juuri KyAMK:in MBA opintoihin (Why did you choose the MBA studies of KyUAS)

- Mitä kautta sait tietää KyAMK:in MBA opinnoista? (How did you learn about the MBA studies of KyUAS?)
- Mitä tiesit ylemmistä amk-opinnoista ja MBA opinnoista ennestään? (How much did you know about the UASS' and the MBA studies before your studies?)
- Mitä tiesit KyAMK:ista ennen näitä opintoja? (What did you know about KyUAS before these studies?)
- Vertailitko KyAMK:in MBA opintojen sisältöä muihin MBA opintoihin muissa opilaitoksissa? (Did you compare the MBA studies of KyUAS with MBA studies of some other institute?)
- Miksi valitsit juuri KyAMK:in? Vaikuttiko KyAMK:in ulkoinen markkinointi tähän päätökseen – miten? (Why did you choose KyUAS? Did the marketing of KyUAS influence on your decision – how?)

Opintojen sisältö (Core service)

- Minkälaiset odotukset sinulla oli opintojen alkaessa, mitä uusia tietoja ja taitoja odotit saavasi? (What kind of expectations did you have when the studies started? What kind of new skills and knowledge did you expect?)
- Mitä mieltä olet koulun kurssitarjonnasta pakollisissa ja vapaavalintaisissa MBA kursseissa? (What do you think about the courses of obligatory and optional courses of the MBA – studies at KyUAS?)
- Mitä uutta opit opintojesi aikana? (What kind of new professional skills did you learn during the studies?)
- Muut tiedot & taidot esim. tiimityöskentely tai projektityöskentely, vuorovaikutustaidot, tiedonhaku, kriittisyys, itsensä kehittämisen taidot, innovaatiovalmiudet, strateginen osaaminen, verkostoituminen, johtamisosaaminen, oppimaan oppiminen jne.
(What kind of other knowledge or skills did you get during the studies, for example team working, project working, interaction, information retrieval, innovativeness, strategic competence, networking, leadership, learning to learn etc.?)
- Miten kehittäisit kurssitarjontaa tai miten muuttaisit painotuksia -lisätä, poistaa, kehittää? (How would you develop the course offer or how would you emphasize the courses – add, remove, develop ?)

Opinnäytetyö (Thesis)

- Missä vaiheessa ymmärsit/tiesit, että näissä opinnoissa tarkoitus on tehdä opinnäytetyötä opintojen alusta asti? (When did you understand that in these studies you should start to do the thesis right from the beginning?)
- Minkälaisen työn olisit halunnut tehdä? Ajattelitko vaihtaa alaa opinnäytetyön myötä? (What kind of a thesis would you have liked to do? Did you plan of changing the career with the thesis?)
- Miten aiheen löytäminen sujui ja mistä? Kenen avulla se löytyi? Miten oppilaitos tai joku muu taho voisi tulla avuksi opinnäytetyön hankkimisessa? (How did you find the thesis subject? Who helped you? How could KyUAS or some other institution help in finding the thesis?)
- Minkälaista tukea sait työelämäosapuolen taholta? Minkälaista ohjeistusta mentori olisi tarvinnut KyAMK:ilta ohjatakseen MBA opinnäytetyötä? (What kind of help did you get from the working life mentor? What kind of instructions would the mentor had needed from KyUAS to mentor your MBA thesis?)
- Miten opinnäytetyöprosessi sujui? (How was the thesis process?)
- Miten opinnäytetyön ohjausprosessi sujui? Miten sujui ohjaajan nimeäminen ja yhteistyö ohjaajan kanssa? (How was the supervision process of the thesis? What about getting a supervisor and how was the cooperation with her/him?)
- Millaisiksi olet kokenut MBA opintoihin kuuluvat tutkimusmenetelmäopinnot? (What do you think about the courses of research methods in the MBA program?)

- Mitä materiaalia olet löytänyt koulun Intranetistä tai muista järjestelmistä opinnäytetyöskentelysi avuksi? (Did you find any material from KyUAS's Intranet to help your thesis process?)
- Miten kehittäisit opinnäytetyöprosessia KyAMK:issa? (How would you develop the thesis process at KyUAS?)
- Mitä odotit opinnäytetyöltä -ammattillisesti, työelämäsuhteet, kontaktit, työpaikka...? What did you expect from the thesis – professionally, working life orientation, contacts, job?)
- Mitä sait/opit tehdessäsi opinnäytetyötä? Jos nyt aloittaisit opinnäytetyön tekemisen, mitä tekisit toisin? (What did you learn during the thesis process? If you started again, what would you change?)

KyAMK:in palveluprosessi (The service process of KyUAS)

Luotettavuus (Reliability)

- Koetko saaneesi sellaista substanssiosaamista, tietoja ja taitoja mitä odotit MBA opinnoilta? Mihin nämä odotukset perustuivat? (Do you think that you received such substance competence, knowledge and skills, which you expected from the MBA studies? What was in the background of these expectations?)
- Miten opetusohjelma ja -aikataulu pitänyt paikkansa? (Any comments on the time tables or the schedule of the studies?)

Reagointialttius (Reactivity)

- Miten halukkaasti KyAMK:in henkilökunta auttanut sinua? Missä asiassa/ miten? (Any comments about the helpfulness of KyUAS employees? In which matters/how?)
- Millaiseksi olet kokenut palvelun nopeuden, esim. vastauksen saamisen kysymyksiisi? (What about the reaction time, for example receiving answers to your questions?)
- Miten nopeasti tehtävien arviointi ja palaute on tullut? (How quickly you have received evaluation of the assignments and the feedback?)

Vakuuttavuus (Assurance)

- Miten ammattimaiseksi koet KyAMK:in henkilökunnan ja opetuksen? (How professional do you find the personnel and the lectures of KyUAS?)
- Miten opetusvälineet ja -järjestelmät tukevat ammattimaista opetusta? (What about the equipment and the systems of KyUAS, are they supporting the professional teaching?)

Empatia (Empathy)

- Miten KyAMK:in henkilökunta on ymmärtänyt ja ennakoinut sinun tarpeitasi? (Has the personnel of KyUAS understood and anticipated your needs?)
- Minkälaisiin ongelmakohtiin odotit saavasi tukea henkilökunnalta - keneltä? (What kind of help did you expect from the personnel? From whom?)

- Koetko saaneesi henkilökohtaista palvelua ja huomiota henkilökunnalta? (Did you get individual service or attention from the personnel?)
- Miten aiempi osaamisesi on huomioitu MBA-opinnoissa esim. hyväksilukuna? (What about recognition of your prior learnings?)

Lähestyttävyys ja joustavuus (Accessibility and flexibility)

- Miten henkilökunta on ollut tavoitettavissa? (Has it been easy to reach the personnel?)
- Miten riittäviksi olet kokenut henkilökunnan määrän ja kontaktimahdollisuudet - luennoitsijat, muu henkilökunta? (Is there enough stuff and contact possibilities with them - the lecturers, other personnel?)
- Miten opintojen aikataulut ja luentojen ajoitus on sujunut? (What about the schedules and timing of the lectures?)

Totuuden hetket (Moments of truth)

- Minkälaisia **kriittisiä hetkiä** olet kokenut kanssakäymisessä koulun henkilökunnan tai koulun resurssien (Winha, Moodle, sähköposti, Internet-sivut) kanssa? Miten ne hoituivat? What kind of critical moments have you had with the personnel or the technical resources of KyUAS? And how did they manage them?)

Palvelun normalisointi (Normalizing the service)

- Jos henkilökunta on tehnyt virheen tai koulun IT-järjestelmät ovat kaatuneet tms. ongelmia on esiintynyt, onko KyAMK korjannut tilanteet hyvin? Tai onko mahdolliset valituksesi hoidettu hyvin? (Have you experienced any mistakes or problems caused by the personnel or the resources of KyUAS? How have they been handled? What about possible complaints?)

Omat vaikutusmahdollisuudet opintoihin tai oppilaitoksen toimintaan (Your own possibilities to influence on the studies or the systems of KyUAS)

- Onko sinulta pyydetty arviointia tai palautetta luennoista tai muista opintoihin liittyvistä asioista tai oletko antanut omaehtoista palautetta? Miten palautteeseen suhtauduttiin? Oliko sillä vaikutusta? (Have you had a chance of giving feedback of your studies? What was the reaction? What kind of influence did your feedback have?)
- Miten kehittäisit palautteenantomahdollisuutta? (How would you develop the feed-back system?)
- Tunnetko koulun opiskelijayhdistystoimintaa? (Do you know the student organization of KyUAS?)

Sisäinen viestintä (Internal communication)

- Miten olet kokenut KyAMK:in viestinnän MBA opiskelijoille? (How does KyUAS communicate with the MBA students?)

- Mitä mieltä olet KyAMK:in web-sivujen ja muiden IT-ohjelmien (Moodle, SoleOPS, Winha) toiminnasta ja informatiivisuudesta? (Do you find the KyUAS-web pages and other programs informative?)
- Miten riittävää ja ymmärrettävää on ollut meitä varten esim. Moodleen syötetty informaatio opintoihin liittyen? Oletko saanut riittävästi informaatiota sähköpostitse tai onko joku tieto jäänyt puuttumaan? (Have you received enough information concerning our studies, for example through Moodle? Is there any information that has not reached you?)
- Minkälaisia viestintäpuutteita olet havainnut KyAMK:in henkilökunnan välillä? (Have you noticed any information gaps within the KyUAS personnel?)

Sisäinen markkinointi (Internal marketing)

- Miten MBA opiskelijoille markkinoitiin KyAMK:in tapahtumia tai kurssitarjontaa, toimintaa tai osallistumismahdollisuuksia esim. kansainväliseen vaihtoon jne.? (What kind of KyUAS happenings or courses were marketed to the MBA students?)

Palvelumaisema/konkreettinen ympäristö (Serviscape/Tangibles)

- Mitä mieltä olet koulun tiloista ja fyysisestä ympäristöstä? (What do you think of the facilities and the equipment of KyUAS?)
- Miten toimivia tai helppokäyttöisiä koulun IT-järjestelmistä (Winha, Moodle, SoleOPS, sähköposti) ovat olleet? (Have the IT-systems of KyUAS (Winha, Moodle, SoleOPS) functioned well?)
- Miten kouluympäristöä ja sen toimivuutta voisi kehittää? (Any development ideas of the facilities?)

KyAMK:in tukipalvelut (Support services of KyUAS)

- Miten olet kokenut opintotoimiston palvelut? (What kind of experiences do you have of the Student Office's services?)
- Oletko ollut tietoinen seuraavista koulun tukipalveluista: ura- ja rekrytointipalvelu; Jobstep; koulun kansainvälinen toimisto; koulun terveystalvelut (terveydenhoitaja, psykologi, pastori)? (Have you heard about the following support services: Career and Recruitment service, Jobstep, International Affairs' Office, the health services (the nurse, the psychologist, the priest) of the university?)
- Mistä sait tiedon näistä tukipalveluista? Mitä mieltä olet näistä palveluista? (Where or how did you hear about these services? Any opinions?)
- Minkälaista apua olet saanut opinto-ohjaajalta? (What kind of help have you received from the student councilor?)
- Miten KyAMK:in Intranet on palvellut sinua? (Have the Intranet pages of KyUAS served you well?)

- Mitä mieltä olet koulun kirjastosta? (What is your opinion of the library?)

KyAMK:in imago (Image of KyUAS)

- Minkälaisena koit KyAMK:in imagon tullessasi opiskelemaan ja entä nyt? (How did you find the image of KyUAS when you entered the studies? Your opinion now?)

Opiskelukaverit (Other students in your group)

- Miten koit kurssin ryhmähengen? (How did you find the team spirit?)
- Minkälaisia yhdessäoppimisen kokemuksia koit opiskelukavereiden kanssa? Miten koit ammatillisen kokemuksen vaihdona opiskelukavereiden kanssa ja miten sitä voisi kehittää? (What kind of experiences of learning together did you have with the other students of the group? What kind of peer learning in professional matters did you have and how could this be developed?)
- Minkälainen kontaktiverkosto opiskelukavereiden välille kehittyi? (What kind of contactnet was there between the students?)
- Minkälaisia ennakko-odotuksia sinulla oli opiskelukavereihin nähden? (Did you have any expectations concerning the other students?)
- Mitä tärkeää opit opiskelukavereiltasi, ryhmässä työskentelystä tai itsestäsi ryhmän jäsenenä? (Did you learn something important from your team colleagues, while working in a team or about yourself as a team member?)

Kansainvälisyys (Internationality)

- Minkälaisia ennakko-odotuksia sinulla oli kansainvälisyydestä englanninkielisissä MBA opinnoissa? Mihin nuo ennakko-odotukset perustuivat? (What kind of expectations did you have of the internationality in these MBA studies in English? What was the base of these expectations?)
- Mitä koet oppineesi kansainvälisyydestä tai monikulttuurisuudesta opintojen aikana? (What have you learned of the internationality or the multiculturalism during the studies?)
- Miten kehittäisit kansainvälisyysasioita MBA opinnoissa- oppilaitosyhteistyö, kurssit, opinnäytetyö, opiskelukaverit, projektit, muu? (How would you develop the internationality in the MBA studies – cooperation with the partner UAS's, courses, thesis, students, projects, something else?)

Työelämäläheisyys (Working orientation)

- Mitä odotit MBA opintojen työelämäläheisyydeltä ja miten koit sen opintojen aikana? Miten kehittäisit työelämäläheisyyttä? (What did you expect of the working life orientation of the MBA studies and how did you experienced it during the studies? How would you develop the working life orientation?)

Koulun R & D ja aluevaikuttavuus (R & D of KyUAS and the regional influence)

- Miten paljon olet tutustunut KyAMK:in tutkimus- ja tuotekehitystyöhön? (How much have you learned about the R & D of KyUAS?)
- Miten KyAMK vaikuttaa Kymenlaakson yrityselämään? Miten se näkyy yleensä ottaen ja miten näkyy MBA opinnoissa? (How much KyUAS influences the business life of Kymenlaakso region? How can it be seen in the general and in the MBA studies?)

Oma aktiivisuus ja osallistuminen (Participation and activity)

- Mikä on ollut oma motivaatiosi opiskeluun ja mikä sitä on nostanut tai laskenut? (How was your motivation for these studies and what increased or decreased the motivation)
- Miten aktiivinen olet ollut - osallistunut luennoille, tehnyt harjoitukset ym.?(How active have you been – attending the lectures, doing the assignments etc.?)
- Mikä opinnoissasi on ollut vaikeaa ja mikä helppoa? (What has been difficult and what has been easy in the studies?)
- Jos aloittaisit opinnot nyt, mitä tekisit toisin nyt tai miten neuvoisit uusia opiskelijoita? (If you started the studies now or if you could give an advice to the new students, what would you say?)
- Mitä ongelmakohtia olet itse tiedostanut -esim. puutteellinen tutkimusmenetelmätuntemus, kieliongelmat, opinnäytetyön aiheen ja työelämäkontaktien puutteen vaikutus tms.? (Any problems, which you have recognized yourself during the studies – low knowledge of the research methods, lack of the thesis subject or working life contacts?)

Ura, palkkaus ja tulevaisuus (Career, compensation and future)

- Minkälaisin odotuksin aloitit MBA opinnot uraa ja tulevaisuutta ajatellen? Mihin nämä odotukset perustuivat? (What kind of expectations did you have when you started the studies, and what were they based on?)
- Miten nyt tällä hetkellä näet MBA opintojen ja tutkinnon vaikuttavan uramahdollisuuksiin, työnsaantimahdollisuuksiin tai palkkaukseen? (How do you find that the MBA degree influences the career possibilities, a new job or the compensation?)